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Warden of New College, Oxford, and Rector of Foxley, Wilts.

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PREFACE.

THE object of the following dissertation is to do justice to the internal evidences of Christianity, by disencumbering them of the weight of that class of objections which, though in popular discussion generally considered as affecting the cause of revelation exclusively, stand in reality in no need of refutation, for the plain and simple reason that they are applicable in exactly the same degree to every possible modification of religion whatever. There is certainly much confusion of idea displayed in the mode by which skeptics for the most part make their assaults upon the credibility of revelation. Of the arguments alleged by them, far the greater proportion will usually be found to militate against principles already admitted by themselves, while almost all of them consist of isolated and desultory attacks upon some detached point of belief, rarely, if ever, at the same time taking an enlarged and impartial survey of the antagonist difficulties which attach to the opposite view of the same question. It is obvious, however, to every person who has paid the slightest attention to the topics of theology, that objections which, when considered separately, appear perfectly unanswerable, may often lose the greater

part of their power of embarrassment when taken as integral portions of a complex system, and even, when viewed as a counterpoise to other propositions not less formidable, may contribute rather to the removal than the suggestion of doubt. Natural no less than revealed religion, in fact, consists of a mass of startling problems, each of which individually appears pregnant with insuperable difficulty, and yet between the counteracting forces of which our faith, whether as philosophical theists or as devout Christians, must be content to preserve its balance. Nothing, accordingly, is so easy of achievement as the task undertaken by the infidel, provided his object be to become the assailant. He has only to limit the discussion to one single view of a necessarily complex subject, and the perplexities which immediately suggest themselves will, of course, so long as we confine ourselves to the same restricted mode of defence, exceed our means of disentanglement. The obvious and, indeed, the only remedy for this species of misapprehension, to which the natural indolence and the less venial passions of mankind too easily dispose them, is that of acquiring, as much as possible, the habit of looking upon the subject-matter of our religious belief as an entire and connected whole; and of considering no one proposition which it seems to involve as altogether inadmissible until we have cautiously balanced it against that contradictory dogma which, in case of its rejection, we shall be obliged to substitute in its place. It is surely, however, no breach of charity to assert that the skeptical disputant against revelation rarely, if ever, proceeds to this length;

and yet, until he has done so, it is certain that he has not given the grand question which he takes upon himself to determine the consideration which it deserves, and which it is fairly, in strict reasoning, capable of receiving. The object aimed at in the ensuing pages is, to expose the fallacy involved in this mode of argument. In so short a work, an attempt to give a general and connected view of the internal evidences of our faith must necessarily confine itself to the discussion of the more general and prominent topics. It will, however, answer its purpose, if, by affording to the reader a comprehensive sketch of the main outline, it induces him to fill up the detail by pursuing that train of thought which the contemplation of so interesting a subject cannot fail to suggest. Even the most firmly-grounded faith in this life being established rather upon a balance between conflicting difficulties than upon positive demonstration, it follows, that the wider we make our intellectual range in examining the general system of Providence, the more we become familiarized with those astounding facts which form the basis of every possible theological theory, and the less we are in consequence disposed to be offended with what we find to be rather the result of an incurable defect in our own intellectual apprehensions than a substantial refutation of our religious creed. It is thus that in proportion as we advance in practical knowledge, the more we perceive the wisdom of that submission of the understanding in certain cases, the idea of which is so offensive to every beginner in the study of theology, but of which no person who, by laborious experience,

has learned the necessity of walking by faith will be ashamed to make his profession. Certain, at all events, it is, that the denial of Christianity affords no escape whatever from most of the difficulties with which, in the hasty judgment of mankind, it stands almost exclusively charged. To every mind endued with the vital feeling of religion sufficient evidence has been afforded by the mercy of the Creator for every purpose of effective moral probation, however inadequate it may be for the gratification of mere curiosity: but the insatiable spirit of skepticism, if it will pursue its course rigorously and consistently to the last, has in strictness no assignable resting-place or limit short of the hopeless extreme of atheism itself.

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THE

CONSISTENCY OF REVELATION

WITH

HUMAN REASON.

CHAPTER I.

The sentiments of Religion natural to the human heart—The Natural Reason unequal to the Investigation of remote Religious Truth—A Revelation is therefore necessary—The authenticity of any presumed Revelation to be determined upon according to external and internal Evidence—Christianity the only system of Religious Belief which is supported by any substantial weight of proof.

ALL modifications of religious belief are, or at least profess to be, solutions, so far as our means of information extend, of the apparent anomalies discernible in the works of Divine Providence. As, then, that religion can only be the true one which really accords with those acknowledged facts in the physical and moral universe, which are established by positive experiment, it necessarily follows, that the true course for arriving at a correct system of belief, is that of studying our own nature carefully and impartially under every possible aspect; of ascertaining its real and most prominent wants, and of determining which of the many theories offered to its choice, most satisfactorily accounts for the numerous perplexing circumstances which the most cursory survey cannot fail to recognise in the existing order of nature. The Christian dispensation will, we conceive, be found upon inquiry, to be the one which best—it would, in fact, be no exaggeration to say, which exclusively—

answers to this test; and to show that it does so, will be the object of the following observations. The question thus proposed for discussion is one of experiment, in the strictest meaning of the term; the basis of the argument being not what a speculative imagination might suppose the constitution of the universe to have been, had God so willed it, but what it actually and demonstrably is. The conclusion at which of course, we hope to arrive, will be, that upon tha practical basis no consistent system of theological belief can be erected, excepting that for the possession of which we are indebted to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. If those remote and mysterious conclusions, which we derive from that Divine source, are found strictly to harmonize in all their parts with the facts previously established by the native faculties of our minds, the probability in favour of its presumed authenticity is at once established:—if every other possible attempt at explication is found, upon examination, either to mis-state the primary truths of the constitution of nature, or to fail in accounting for any of its startling anomalies, the probability thus assumed will amount to little short of certainty. Such is the position which we trust that the Christian Revelation will be found to occupy, if impartially examined, in the first place, as a system of doctrines consistent with itself, and with the acknowledged course of nature; and, secondly, when contrasted with those various theories which have, from time to time, been urged by ingenious men in opposition to it. The question, we repeat, is one of strict experiment; and being such, we shall commence our observations by advancing such assertions only as probably no religionists of whatever denomination will hesitate in admitting.

No one fact, then, connected with the circumstances of human nature would seem to be more completely established by experience than that contained in the Scriptural aphorism, that the heart of man is evil

from his youth. This evil tendency is conspicuous, not merely in the gross vices and ferocious habits of the savage, or in the unsubdued passions of the comparatively ignorant members of more civilized communities, but under every, the most plausible modification of society in its highest state of artificial refinement. The same selfishness of motive, the same worldliness of feeling, the same concentration of the thoughts upon the trifling interests of sensual gratifications of the present moment, with a reckless indifference for the higher principles of morals, however disguised by the conventional decencies of society, characterize our species to the last, wherever the strong external stimulant of religion is wanting.

Yet, though such are the ordinary habits of our nature when left to itself, nothing, on the other hand, is more certain, than that the principle of religious feeling is also natural to man, and suggests to him one of his most prominent wants. Let his attention once be diverted from its usual channel by some strong moral excitement—let sickness or sorrow dissipate for a moment the illusions of the bodily senses, or the intellectual powers, whether from curiosity or some worthier motive, seriously occupy themselves in the examination of the great questions connected with our first origin, and with our ultimate destination, and a reverential feeling of devotion, accompanied by a consciousness of his own responsible position, takes possession of him as a matter of course. That the sentiment thus roused is not the production of mere ignorance and superstition, is evident from the circumstance that the accutest understandings and the most exquisitely attempered dispositions are most disposed to its influence. We have only to feel it in order to be unanswerably convinced of its Divine origin. The sensations thus excited are experimentally the noblest and the purest of any that we are conscious of possessing. The uniform mode of their operation, in every variety of the human mind, is

again another proof that they derive their origin from the regular course of our natural constitution, and not from the desultory suggestions of caprice. That, for instance, the examination of the wonderful structure of the universe leads us necessarily, by a direct and unanswerable chain of inference, to the theory of an intelligent and self-existent First Cause; that a like examination of our own intellectual operations and perceptions leads us as necessarily to conclusions favourable to the doctrine of the immateriality,* and, therefore, probable immortality of the thinking principle within us, and that the feeling which we denominate conscience, will, in exact proportion to the degree in which we cultivate it, create a still increasing

* Every judgment which we can possibly form, after a careful examination of the operation of our minds, leads us to conclusions, perfectly irreconcilable with the supposition of the soul's materiality. Not one of the many phenomena of matter with which we are acquainted has the slightest resemblance to those of thought and consciousness. But the objection to the materialist theory does not terminate here. Admitting, what it would be a mere gratuitous assumption to admit, that sensation might possibly be the result of mere corporeal organization, we should still find ourselves unable to account for that conviction of our own *singleness* and *individuality* which accompanies every exertion of our thoughts. Why, we should still ask, if the soul is but an assemblage of divisible parts mechanically adjusted, has not every sensory organ a distinct and peculiar consciousness exclusively and incommunicably its own? What is the one indivisible entity which presides over the whole; which takes cognizance of, and pronounces judgment upon, the various animal and intellectual perceptions, and refers them all to itself? "Se in un popolo o in un esercito," says Francesco Soave, "un sente fame, uno sete, e questi ha caldo, e quel freddo, ed altri ha dolore in una mano, altri in un piede o nel petto o nel capo, chi dirà mai che il popolo o l'esercito tanto insieme sia consapevole delle sensazioni che ha separatamente ciascuno individuo?

"Ne si pretenda che il paragone non valga, perchè ogn' uomo e qui separato da ogn' altro. Imperocchè nel cervello ancora, e in qualunque E-ser composto, ogni minima parte ha un' esistenza così sua propria, e distinta, e separata d' ogni altra, come qualunque uomo in un popolo o in un' esercito.

"Per qualunque verso dunque si prenda un Esser composto, e o si consideri nel suo tutto, o nelle sue parti, è sempre assolutamente impossibile, ch' ei sia consapevole a se stesso di più sensazioni e percezioni simultanee. E poichè noi di queste simultanee sensazioni e percezioni a noi medesimi siam consapevoli realmente, ne vien d' assoluta necessità, che oltre alla sostanza composta e materiale che forma il corpo, in noi debba esistere un' altra sostanza diversa affatto da quella, cioè, non composta, ma pura, unica, semplice, indivisibile, che è quella che chiamiamo *anima o spirito*."

susceptibility of moral apprehensions, and a consequent conviction of the imputability of our actions, are propositions, the truth of which it is impossible to deny. Man, therefore, may be said to possess two directly opposite characters, each of them in a certain sense equally natural: the one, that which exists of itself, prior to any regular system of moral cultivation, and which is almost exclusively swayed by animal instinct: the other, that which only waits to be called forth by habits of discipline, and which is sure to manifest itself the moment that circumstances become favourable for its developement. Now, there assuredly can be no doubt which of these two dissimilar states is most worthy of our approbation, and most accordant with the presumed wisdom of Him who placed us in our present condition. The highest possible elevation to which we can attain under the former, is that of apparently inoffensive, and, perhaps, not altogether unserviceable, members of society, concealing the real selfishness of our disposition by the conventional laws of decorum, and subduing our natural ferocity by a sense of its inexpediency, but with a strict limitation of all our hopes and fears within the narrow limits of human life: whilst under the latter, not only every external action, but also every internal thought, is restrained by an efficient control, and, instead of merely temporal and inferior motives of conduct, others of a most vivid and unearthly character are substituted, ample in their scale and character as eternity itself.

Still, however, whilst such is the general capability of religious impression which we derive from our natural constitution, it by no means follows from any necessary deductions of our reasoning powers, what ought to be the peculiar form and modification of that system of belief which alone deserves to fall under the high designation of true religion. That which has reference to the system of the whole universe and to the essential attributes of the Almighty mind itself, is

obviously incapable of being measured by the mere human intellect, taking for its rule and standard the few facts supplied by its very limited experience in this world. We may follow up inference after inference, cautiously deducing remoter and less palpable truths from those primary ones, which are more immediately the result of our personal experience. But the inquiry very soon leads us beyond the utmost verge of legitimate human knowledge. We feel, indeed, with the most unhesitating certainty, that the stake of our happiness is in some way or other interwoven with those undeveloped mysteries which we strive to penetrate, but we are acquainted with no natural instruments by which we can arrive at them. A powerful instinct urges us forward, but our bewildered reason strives in vain to keep pace with it. A correct system of religion again, having, as was just now observed, reference to the real circumstances of nature, it follows as a matter of course, that some one modification of doctrine must be not only superior to all others, but, as truth is self-consistent and immutable, must be exclusive of all others: that is to say, it must be true, and all the rest, so far as they do not constitute an integral portion of it, must be necessarily false. But how are we to arrive at the knowledge what that one and exclusive modification of religion is?

This is an inquiry in which, indeed, our natural intellectual powers must take their share, as even our most vague conjectures must depend upon our reasoning faculties, in the last resort, for whatever degree of probability they may possess; but still it is perfectly vain for us to hope that the area of our spiritual apprehensions can be widely extended by any talent of discovery vested in the human mind itself. Meanwhile it is impossible to infer that God has given us the need of religious sentiment, and yet denied to us the means of gratification. Grant the existence of the instinct, and the analogy of nature will assure us that it was imparted for some definite end and object.

Admitting, then, as two concurrent truths, the fact of the necessity of religion to the human heart, with that of the insufficiency of the human understanding for its effectual acquisition, and we are driven, almost of necessity, to the inference, that the wisdom and goodness of our Maker would provide in some mode or other for supplying the defect. It would seem, then, that a communication from heaven, so far from being intrinsically improbable, is, on the contrary, what we might appear to have strong *à priori* reason for expecting from the mercy of Providence; whilst all that, under such circumstances, would remain for our intellectual powers to perform in their own proper department, would be to judge of the evidence of such revelation as that now supposed, by the same rules of probability derived from their really accessible means of knowledge, which they would apply to every other case of external testimony. This is undoubtedly the course of proceeding which the theory of Christianity requires at our hand; and it would be difficult to show that, all the circumstances of our nature considered, the demand which it thus makes upon our obedience and belief, is repugnant to the dictates of sound reason.

It appears then, if the foregoing propositions are correct, that the idea of the one true religion necessarily involves that of "an express revelation from heaven;" no natural operation of the mind of man being capable of making him acquainted with those phenomena of the invisible universe in which, notwithstanding, he has a decided interest; whilst the facts thus revealed, being many of them obviously beyond the compass of the human faculties to appreciate, are capable of being rendered objects of substantial belief, not by their own objective clearness, but only by the "*evidence*" with which they may be accompanied. One standard, indeed, our minds undoubtedly possess, which is and ought to be available even in the transcendental dogmas of revelation, that

is to say, our moral sense, such as we have every reason to believe that it has been implanted within us by our Maker. No religion, under any external weight of testimony whatever, can be admitted as the true one, the principles of which are unequivocally opposed to that faculty. Many revealed dogmas might, and undoubtedly would, be found above its apprehension and that of our intellectual powers, but none would be directly hostile to it. With this single exception then—an exception, which, after all, we must have recourse to only with extreme caution—we must be prepared to receive that one system of religious belief which we acknowledge as authentic, in the form of an external communication, and not of any discovery made by our own reasoning powers; whilst the evidence which will command our assent to it, will be of that peculiar description which our limited faculties are best able to apprehend, namely, the accordance of the presumed revelation with the acknowledged constitution and necessities of our own nature, the dignity and worthiness of its object, its internal consistency with itself as a whole and in all its parts, and the confirmatory attestation of those persons whose actual position as eye-witnesses, and the known integrity of whose characters, put their assertions beyond the reach of suspicion.

Admitting, then, that there exists *somewhere* an authentic revelation of the Divine will (and if we deny that fact we deny every one of the foregoing propositions,) the question to be resolved is simply this, "which of all the modes of opinion which have assumed the name, *is* that revelation?" Now it is certainly not assuming too much, to assert that Christianity alone has the slightest claim to that character. The various religious opinions of mankind are matters of history. The events which first suggested the leading and peculiar principle of each, which fostered their growth, and gave them that hold upon the minds of their supporters which in their

several degrees they have respectively possessed, are all such as may be readily accounted for by considering the peculiar habits of the societies in which they severally arose, the worldly interests or national predilections which they served to cherish, the then existing state of comparative ignorance or literature, and often the mistaken theories respecting the structure of the material universe, which subsequent discoveries in science have effectually overthrown. Such is undoubtedly the case with every modification of religious belief with which we are acquainted, Christianity alone excepted. Every distinguishing characteristic, on the contrary, of this latter religion, is marked with peculiarities preeminently its own. It is referrible to no natural causes with which we are acquainted. Its first appearance was like that of a comet entering our planetary system. We can neither surmise from whence it comes, nor speculate upon the far remote regions with which its destinies are connected; but we look up to it with awe, and, in spite of our ignorance, feel a satisfied assurance that its operations are among those which are under the superintendence of infinite Wisdom. That, so far from having the way prepared for it by the previous habits of society, or by its accordance with human notions and passions, it, on the contrary, made its way in direct opposition to national prejudices, philosophical theories, and above all, to the natural sensuality and self-love of the human heart:—that it professed to be supported by the most miraculous deviations from the ordinary course of events, and yet gained implicit credit from persons who could have no interest in professing their belief in it if they knew it to be false, and who, had it been false, had undoubtedly the means of its refutation in their own hands:—that commencing from apparently the humblest of all humble beginnings, possessed of no temporal authority, and arrayed in none of our earthly notions of "beauty that we should desire it," it, notwithstand-

ing, spread rapidly over the whole civilized world, and impressed an entirely new character upon human society:—that during the space of eighteen centuries it has sustained every shock which the violence of its persecutors, the calumnies and arguments of its most inveterate opponents, or the vices and superstitions of its less informed followers could inflict upon it, and that, at this moment, it stands entire; assented to in all points by a vast number of men of the most enlightened minds, and by none more than by those who have most sedulously examined its evidences:—that, be it true, or be it false, it is an undoubted fact, that the most valuable members of society, the most perfect specimens of the human race, have been those who have made its doctrines their rule of faith, its injunctions the guide of their practice:—all these are points which the Christian believer may unhesitatingly assert as incontrovertible truths, and which, perhaps, few professed sceptics would have the hardihood to controvert. Why, then, having succeeded thus far, has it not done still more? To what are we to attribute the slowness with which, in latter times, this singular religion has made and continues to make its way through the world? Why, at every step of its progress, is it opposed and impeded, not merely by the violence of those passions which it is its professed object to eradicate or control, but occasionally also by the more plausible hostility of men of seeming candour, of great literary acquirements, and of apparently sound morals?

This is a question which it is natural to put, and to which it may appear difficult to return a satisfactory answer. That men of enlightened minds should despise a sensual, and detest a selfish or cruel code of religion, seems natural and just. But that they should assume a degree of merit in traducing the most single-minded and self-denying of all practical rules of conduct, and that they should coalesce for the purpose of bringing into disrepute the only seemingly well au-

thenticated revelation from heaven which would raise us above the earth, and hold out the prospect of a happy immortality, is a phenomenon which appears at first sight perfectly inexplicable. To discuss this subject, and to show that the blame is not justly attributable to any want of reasonableness in the religion itself, will be the object of the following remarks. Perhaps it may appear in the sequel, that this very species of hostility which Christianity has met with, is to be considered among the strongest proofs of its unearthly origin. Most assuredly it is the very kind of reception which Scripture has expressly declared that it would receive from the passions and prejudices of mankind.

CHAPTER II.

Of the Prejudices commonly entertained by Men of the World against Revelation.

It is not necessary, in order to account for the rejection of Christianity by many persons of otherwise cultivated minds, and by a very considerable portion of mere men of the world, to suppose that they are conscious to themselves of any calculated motives of hostility, or any unusual laxity of morals. It is enough that we know from Scripture and from experience, that the natural heart of man is prone to elf-indulgence; and as such is averse from the labour of a painful investigation of abstract and mysterious subjects, especially where the remuneration of that labour is professedly not immediate, but the deferred and uncertain allotment of a future state of existence. The instinctive wants of the body are immediate in their demands upon our attention, and are clamorous if neglected; they require no painful tension of the understanding to perceive their object, nor any great

ingenuity to attain to their gratification. There is an obvious and palpable connexion of cause and effect between the pursuit of the thing sought for, the acquisition of it, and the enjoyment resulting from its possession. And what is thus true of our corporeal pleasures, taken in their lowest stage, is still no less true of them in their highest, however plausibly they may be disguised by the refinements of civilization, and even elevated by their association with philosophy and science. Immediate fruition in some shape or other, is equally the aim of all. To persons in this disposition of mind, religion, with its long catalogue of abstruse propositions, of thin abstractions, of immediate privations, and deferred retributions, necessarily comes as an unwelcome intruder. It never can be the case that they should turn willingly from pursuits at once so apparently natural and so attractive, to the impalpable and obscure speculations of theology, more especially when, in addition to the more vivid impression made upon the imagination by temporal objects, and the indolence which shuns all presumed unnecessary inquiry, the heavy price is to be paid of a self-denial, not only in the case of confessedly degrading pleasures, but in that also of those which the generality of mankind deem perfectly inoffensive. This observation, it is true, seems to apply rather to the study of religion in general than to that of the Christian revelation exclusively. But it should be remembered, that if we once give up the theory of a direct revelation, and leave each person to the peculiar creed suggested by his own moral sense, every man's religious speculations become, from that moment, rather a matter of amusement than of painful coercion. The ingenuity of self-love will invariably, in such circumstances, adapt its speculations to its own tastes and predilections, and will as assuredly contrive to suggest some excuse for the indulgence of the passions as the pure code of Christianity is inflexible in

restraining them. The real feeling of repugnance begins then, and then only, when, instead of pursuing our own visionary caprices, and misnaming them religion, we are peremptorily required to adopt a system of belief external to ourselves in its origin, uncompromising in its injunctions, and unearthly in its remunerations. There is a point of repulsion at the very outset, in this latter case, which discourages any mutual attempt at approximation in notions and feelings thus little in unison. It matters not by what weight of external or internal evidence such a creed may chance to be supported, or how perfectly accordant its data may be with the ultimate conclusions of sound philosophy. In a case of this description the average of worldly men make their election, not from deep and painful calculation, but from the impulse of the moment; and, having once taken their station with this or that party, seek to tranquillize their consciences and lull their fears, by occupying a kind of neutral ground between vague admissions and practical unbelief; while those of more courage, or more acute talents, take the bolder step of becoming at once the assailants, and attacking the credibility of the doctrines, the obligations of which they would evade.

Nothing can be more obvious than that any religion, however true, and even in a certain sense demonstrably such, would have little chance of making very numerous converts, if examined only in the perfunctory and prejudiced manner now described. Few truths are so attractive at their first aspect as they appear eventually upon further discussion; and of all truths, those of theology are the least so. From first to last it involves a tissue of seeming paradoxes, into the admission of which we are eventually driven, not so much from the light by which they are themselves surrounded, as by the anomalies, the contradictions, the impossibilities, the total degradation of our best and noblest feelings, which would be the

necessary consequence of their rejection. We cannot, therefore, be surprised that truths of this kind, if injudiciously stated, or indolently discussed, must often fail of carrying conviction! Nothing can be easier than to make out a plausible case against isolated portions of an intricate and mysterious theory with auditors who, even if they possess natural talent sufficient for the purpose, have, at all events, never taken the trouble to examine its consistency as a whole, and in the minds of a greater part of whom a bias in the opposite direction may, without any breach of charity, be presumed to exist: nor need we accordingly be surprised, however we may be grieved, to see a laugh raised against the supposed weakness and superstition of speculative men by persons who have never been taught to acknowledge any higher standard of morals than that of social expediency, or any wish beyond that of the gratification of the selfish passions of pleasure, avarice, or ambition.

Such, however, is infidelity under its most common aspect. In this deplorable stage of it, the first attempt at cure must be made by the application of moral rather than of intellectual medicines. The very simplest effort of the attention is wanting, and that is to be roused by alarming the fears and appealing to the consciences of the respective parties before we can have any chance of success from argumentative discussion. It is, therefore, to unbelief of a higher and more intellectual order that any more elaborate exposition of the Christian evidences, as establishing the reasonableness and consistency of revelation, must be addressed. Now common candour obliges us to admit, that acute reasoners, and humanly speaking, amiable men, have undoubtedly existed from time to time, who, having as they thought impartially examined the arguments for and against Christianity, have decided upon unbelief as the least difficulty of the two; and who, without entertaining any violent hostility against it as a system of opinions,

have still asserted the incurable ignorance of the human mind upon those mysterious topics, and justified, accordingly, their unwillingness to inquire further by the assumption that all inquiry is manifestly useless. In order, therefore, to meet opponents of this description, it may be desirable to examine how far their peculiar class of objections weigh against the doctrines of Christianity exclusively, considering them, as in fact they are, a superaddition to the fundamental principles of natural religion; or, on the other hand, how far they may be equally valid against every modification of religion whatever. Should the latter appear to be the case, it would follow, either that their argument involves a fallacy, as attributing exclusively to the revelation of Jesus Christ an objection which applies equally elsewhere, or it would prove more than themselves intend, by showing that religion of every description, that of pure unmixed theism not excepted, is a sentiment alien to our nature. Few professed infidels, who have not discarded all the restraints of conscience, would, perhaps, be hardy enough to venture this latter assertion. Yet scarcely any of them have had the candour and good sense to remark, that by far the greater number of attacks, which they profess to direct solely against Christianity, strike directly, if any where, at the basis of all religion whatever. This confusion of ideas it is necessary to point out and correct, if we would discuss the peculiar evidences and merits of the Gospel accurately and fairly.

CHAPTER III.

Of the difficulties which attach in common to Natural, no less than Revealed Religion; and of those which belong exclusively to Christianity.

CHRISTIANITY, then, may be contemplated in two distinct points of view, both of them in their respective sense equally correct. It may be considered as a whole and entire system of theology, having natural theology for its basis, and revelation for its crown and capital; or it may be viewed in the light of a corrective of the apparent anomalies, and as explanatory of the many difficulties, which perplex every, the most rational theory of belief, in the absence of a distinct revelation. According to the former mode of seeing it, natural religion will seem to be concurrent with it, and to constitute an integral portion of it; whilst, according to the latter, it will in some measure be opposed to it. This distinction, we repeat, has not been sufficiently remarked by those persons who have assailed the doctrines of the Gospel. Professing themselves to be sincere Theists, they have still directed their assault so vaguely and indiscriminately as to cut away from under their own feet the very support upon which they have taken their stand. That religion, including under that term the essential doctrine of an all-wise and all-benevolent Ruler of the universe, and of the soul's immortality, is natural to cultivated and civilized man, they assert no less confidently than ourselves. But though it is easy to make this admission, and to fancy that we cordially assent to it, it is by no means easy to anticipate all the remote and perplexing inferences, which, if traced systematically, step by step, necessarily result from it. Those two main principles once granted, almost every difficulty, which has been invidiously alleged

as specially impugning the theory of the Gospel, immediately assails the consistent Deist in the very commencement of his inquiry. The beautiful mechanism of the universe evidently announces the existence of an intelligent and benevolent Author. Yet whence did that Almighty Author derive his own eternal existence? Until the rational Theist can see his way through this primary difficulty, it is in vain that he argues against the assumed improbability of those facts superadded by revelation to the no less inexplicable religion of nature. Suppose this great riddle once satisfactorily solved; another equally perplexing immediately presents itself. He who is confessedly the great Cause, and author of all things, would appear to be necessarily impassive in his nature; since it seems impossible to suppose that any created object can be endued with such qualities as to react forcibly, and by external agency, upon the volition of its own Creator. Yet once admit this seemingly obvious conclusion, and all those very moral attributes of the Deity, which entitle him to our love and reverence, and which the Theist professes to assert as pertinaciously as the Christian, fall immediately to the ground. An impassive and imperturbable Supreme Being would, in reality, differ little from the nominal deity of Epicurus. A universe might, according to such an hypothesis, exist, (provided, indeed, that the very supposition of a creation emanating from a Creator thus isolated from external objects, does not involve a contradiction) but the Almighty mind could not, in such a case, be imagined to exercise any moral, and scarcely any physical, superintendence over it. Such a being might be presumed to be necessarily occupied solely in the contemplation of his own infinite perfections, and to be incapable of all sympathy with us and our concerns. Yet the doctrine of a Creator, thus indifferent to the welfare of his creatures, is too monstrous to meet with the patronage of any reasonable sceptic.

How then does he make his way through this seemingly inexplicable difficulty? Merely by the fact that, whilst his metaphysical theories suggest one thing, his own moral sense, and all his better and sublimer feelings, inculcate the directly opposite conclusion.

The sceptic, in the next place, admits the doctrine of the soul's immortality, because without that admission, under the present unequal distribution of worldly prosperity, religion itself were an empty name. Yet press him with the consequences of thi assertion, ask him if the souls of the virtuous and the wicked are alike immortal, what must be the distinction between their respective allotments in a future state of existence? and he shelters himself under the general plea of ignorance; in other words, he shrinks from following the inquiry into all its consequences, which, if so pursued, would necessarily lead him to some conclusion not very remote from that which he charges as a foremost blemish upon the Gospel.

Again, the existence of evil in all its forms, whether moral, physical, or intellectual, is an enigma which every Theist is bound to reconcile with his own self-styled rational views of religion, or to confess that the difficulties accompanying any peculiar modification of belief do not necessarily afford a ground for rejecting the evidences upon which it may chance to be built. Whence originates the acknowledged inequality in the dispensation of the good and evil things of this life? Why did an almighty and all-benevolent Being (for such a Deity he professes to acknowledge) check the operations of his goodness, and deal out happiness in such scanty, pain and imperfection in such ample proportions? Why was the human mind endowed with such gigantic powers of apprehension, such high and indefinite aspirations, whilst the circumstances in which it is placed are such as to cause a vast waste of unemployed faculties, and to suggest little more than abortive schemes for the attainment of what would seem imaginary good?

What, again, does natural religion teach as a solution of that inextricable mystery, the compatibility of free will with the operation of external motives, and of God's foreknowledge, the ineffectual discussion of which has brought unmerited obloquy upon Christianity, as though the difficulty had originated from that source, or that the denial of revelation would contribute any thing towards its removal?

The rationalist may, indeed, shut his eyes, and choose not to see, or he may otherwise occupy his thoughts and may really be not aware of the darkness involved in the foregoing questions, but most certainly that darkness is as old as philosophy itself. If the Christian is more perplexed by discussions of this nature than the mere Theist, it is only because from the tremendous importance of his creed, his mind has been rendered more anxious and contemplative, that reflection has become a more momentous duty, and the current of his thoughts, in consequence, been more systematically turned in that direction. True, indeed, it is, that the mysteries here alluded to are far from comprehending all that are involved in the admission of the truth of Christianity. All that is now asserted is, that it is both unfair and illogical to lay exclusively to the charge of that peculiar form of belief, perplexities which it shares in common with every other modification of theistical inquiry, and from which the adoption of the gross absurdities and inconsistencies of even Atheism itself would scarcely afford us a shelter. Without, then, pretending to deny that the Gospel revelation has difficulties really and specially its own, we would merely urge that it is those specific and peculiar difficulties, and no other, which suggest a legitimate subject of discussion to the sceptic. By a sober investigation of them, then, let it be tried. The result, we are satisfied, will be, that the additional enigmas which it proposes, beyond those attaching to natural religion, are not more in number than might be fairly anticipated

from the wider survey of the Divine arrangements which it affords to our minds, and the consequent necessity for the supply of new matter for wonder which this last supposition involves. We may add, also, that if the perplexities which Christianity may thus appear to have superadded to the religion of nature be found, as assuredly many of them will be found, to explain and remove some of those which previously encumbered the principles of Theism; such explanations ought in fairness to be taken, so far as they may go, as a set-off against the new difficulties thus introduced, and as a diminution of their total amount. This act of justice infidelity will, perhaps, never be found to have voluntarily conceded, but it is obviously claimable upon every sound principle of argument. Let us illustrate this observation by what, we know, occurs every day in the pursuits of experimental philosophy.

If we might venture to speculate upon what might be presumed *à priori* to be the probable effect of sudden illumination of the human mind, on the subject of the great principles of religion, we should naturally be disposed to expect a result perfectly analogous with that which we know from experience accompanies every similar enlargement of our apprehension of the objects of physical science: that is to say, the mind would gain a step in advance, and occupy a wider area of knowledge than before, but at the same time the concurrent effect would be that whilst some preexisting difficulties would be partially, and others perhaps satisfactorily, explained, the accumulation of new facts, thus occasioned, would necessarily bring with it an accession of perplexity, of which we were not aware in the earlier stage of our progress. In the present state of the human faculties, one source of doubt is removed only by the inevitable introduction of another. A phenomenon in chymistry or in natural history may be explained by the discovery of some hitherto unknown principle,

but that fresh discovery, whilst it serves as a key to unlock former subjects of doubt, is itself quite as perplexing as those which it has removed. It is impossible to deny that Newton has truly explained the phenomena of the planetary system, by referring them to the universal law of gravitation. But this discovery has only put us in possession of one link the more in the eternal chain of consequences, so that, instead of asking any longer what it is which retains the heavenly bodies in, and gives regularity to, their respective courses, our question now is, what is the principle which gives to all matter whatever, its power of mutual and reciprocal attraction. The subject matter of our knowledge is increased, but our final ignorance remains the same. Our intellectual horizon shifts as we advance, but the same mass of clouds hangs to the last on its extreme verge.

With regard, then, to the admitted difficulties of Christianity, it may be confidently asserted, that in this respect the sceptic does not argue the matter fairly. He assumes that a Divine revelation ought necessarily to operate as a universal solution of pre-existing doubt, whereas the infinite and stupendous nature of the problems with which it has to do, and the admitted fact of the very limited faculties of the human mind, ought naturally to have suggested to him the directly opposite conclusion. The idea of a religion without mystery involves, in fact, little less than a contradiction of terms. The science of theology, we repeat, is nothing more or less than that course of inquiry by which, availing ourselves of every clue which Providence has placed in our hands for the solution of the enigma, we strive to account for the existence of those phenomena in the material and intellectual creation which appear to us at first sight unworthy of the presumed wisdom in which all things, as a whole, are admitted to have been formed. Now if the whole course of this inquiry, from the very first surmises of human reason to the profoundest

dogmas of revelation, is necessarily one of embarrassment, it is obviously unscientific and unphilosophical to adopt a theory so far only as it embraces the maximum of perplexity, and to become indolent and incredulous at the precise point where something like an explanatory process appears to be commencing. This, however, is really the line pursued by those persons who, having, as they imagine, from conviction, admitted the great principles of natural religion, are willing to take their final stand there, and advance no further. To the real consistent Atheist, of course, such arguments as the present do not apply. Contradictions and anomalies are the strong holds in which he loves to entrench himself. The more absurdities he imagines that he discovers, the more unassailable his creed becomes. The defect of his theory is, not that seeming oversights are traceable in the established order of things, but that they are not to be found in sufficient quantities to make out his case. But the Theist commits the paralogism of admitting all the difficulties of belief whilst he rejects those antagonist and remedial propositions which would go far to remove them. Take, for instance, the perplexing fact already alluded to, of the existence of evil. Considered as an integral portion of mere rational theology, it presents nothing but unmixed embarrassment. Adopt the solution afforded by Christianity, and, though the original question remains unanswered, why a wise Providence has not proceeded at once more directly to its object, but has made ignorance and personal suffering a necessary step towards the attainment of ultimate good; still it follows, as a self-evident truth, that if our present life be, as Scripture asserts that it is, a state of probation, the existence of temporary evil is implied as a necessary constituent of the operation intended to be wrought. Thus much, at all events, the original difficulty is diminished. What the sceptic does not, and will not see in this, and in other similar cases is,

that the theory of revelation does not pretend to account for those primary facts which are evidently beyond the grasp of our apprehension to embrace, but that it suggests merely a practical rule of life, with a superaddition of fresh subsequent positions which, if we are willing to take the former one for granted, will, in some measure reconcile their contradictions, and establish their compatibility with th arrangements of Divine wisdom.

Considered in this point of view, many circumstances in the doctrines of the Gospel, which when considered by themselves would present only unmixed wonder, and which accordingly have ever been prominent marks for the assaults of infidelity, are, in reality, so far from adding to the general mass of improbabilities which meet the theologian in every step of his course, that they leave the general question far more clear than they found it. To demonstrate this fact, will be the object of the following pages. He assuredly must know, indeed, little of the impenetrable darkness which surrounds us, who would hope in this life to reduce the simplest propositions, even of physical science, much less the transcendental dogmas of theology, into the form of self-evident truths. All that any exposition of the Christian evidences can presume to effect, is merely to show that revelation accords, not with our abstract theories and capricious surmises of what we choose to assume that God's creation ought to have been, but with what experience tells us that it actually is. That it does so accord in all points; that the undisguised and unequivocal admission of the actual existence of what we have ventured to call the seeming anomalies in the constitution of the universe is one of its fundamental propositions, and that without attempting to explain them away, it affords the best solution of the difficulties they suggest, which is to be found in the annals of religious philosophy, is all that we can in fairness be called upon to show. Much, after all,

must be left to that principle of faith which, like its sister virtue, charity towards man, "believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." But that very residue of incurable ignorance, against which in this world we find it fruitless to struggle, is among the strongest pledges afforded us by Providence, that our present allotment is not intended to be final.

CHAPTER IV.

Of the Necessity, as demonstrated by experience, of the existence of a written Revelation of the Divine Will.

If, then, the view now taken of the question at issue between the defenders and the assailants of Christianity be correct, it will appear, not only that that sublime theory is not in itself accountable for the facts which experience has shown to form part of the existing order of things, but, on the contrary, that the admitted existence of those facts gives a substantial probability to that theory, which it would not otherwise possess. That such is the case, will be more clearly shown by considering, separately and distinctly, the several component parts of the Christian system, and showing that, however improbable, *à priori* and humanly speaking, each of them may appear, when viewed in the form of detached propositions, they present themselves almost in the light of necessary remedial processes, the moment that we consider them with reference to those startling positions of natural religion, the certainty of which, by no subterfuge of the reason, we are capable of evading or denying. To begin, then, with what must at the first point of view be considered as an incident little likely to be expected in the arrangements of Providence, namely, the necessity of the communication of a dis-

tinct written revelation of the Divine will, to creatures whom their Maker has already endued with a moral sense and considerable reasoning powers.

We readily admit, that, were the creation of man still a thing *in futuro*, such an arrangement as that now contended for might appear to beings, reasoning as we do, far from probable. Why in the original allotment of the moral faculties of man, God chose to leave his work so far imperfect as that it should require a course of subsequent reparation and of special Divine interference for its correction, it is impossible to explain. The question, however, is here not one of argument or of speculation upon presumed possibilities, but of fact. We appeal at once to that anomalous thing, human nature, and deny, because the testimony of history is uniform as to this point, that man, constituted, as we know him to be, *can* attain to any high degree of moral and spiritual elevation, independently of such adventitious help as that derivable from a written communication of the Divine will. The thing has been, as we know, frequently and fairly tried. Nations, under almost every possible modification of condition, *have* existed in ignorance of a Divine revelation, and the result has invariably been the same in character, if not exactly so in degree. In many cases man has sunk in real degradation far below the level of the brute creation, and in none has assumed that high moral elevation which is made attainable to us by Christianity. In every such instance the best and noblest powers of the human heart and head have lain dormant, and the grossest principles have constituted the main moving spring of social action; nor have the actual moral capabilities of our nature been at all apprehended until the promulgation of a positive law, under the most solemn sanctions, and professing to emanate from Divine authority, impressed a new character upon society. Now, it is easy to ask, "why was not man so constituted as to begin his course at that advanced stage

of improvement to which it is the acknowledged object of revelation eventually to lead him?" But to this question the mere Deist is as much called upon to return a satisfactory answer as the Christian. Both must alike shelter themselves in their ignorance. The case, however, we repeat, is nevertheless one of acknowledged fact. It has been charged as an improbability against the Christian system, that the revelation of it was delayed until 4000 years of man's history had passed away: nor do we, any more than in the former case, attempt to give an explanation of this circumstance. One thing, however, has at all events been established by it: that is to say, it has by this means been irrefragably proved, that the highest powers of unassisted human reason are perfectly incapable of making any real discoveries in religion. Had we no other scale by which to estimate the value of revelation, the strange and innumerable modifications of error which prevailed, even in the most highly cultivated nations, during the period of its absence, would effectually supply one. If, however, it be now certain, and certain it appears to be, as infinitely modified experiments can make it, that such is the natural feebleness of the human mental powers, what becomes of the favourite contemptuous argument of the Infidel, which assumes at once the *à priori* improbability of any Divine revelation whatever, the object of which should be the correction of those deficiencies?

It signifies nothing towards the discussion in question, whether or not Providence in its wisdom might not have arranged things otherwise. Our reference is to man as we know him to be constituted, and to the existing order of things. To say nothing of the Pagan ages of antiquity, and the moral abominations which pervaded every class of society in the most brilliant days of classic Greece and Italy, let the Infidel explain why at this moment, as we cast our eyes over the different portions of the globe, we find

Christianity and civilization coextensive; and why, even among the nations of Christendom, those are confessedly most advanced in all the arts which elevate our nature, whose modification of belief approaches nearest to the primitive purity of the Bible? Let him show, with such data before him, that the assertion of the special interference of the Deity for the illumination of the human race, involves an absurd or untenable proposition. All that he *has* shown is, that, were man's nature differently constituted, such external helps might not, perhaps, have been necessary. A conclusion which no believer in revelation will deny, but which proves nothing with respect to the point at issue.

We will assume, then, as the basis of the following arguments, that an actual revelation of the Divine will cannot, under existing circumstances, be said to be otherwise than probable. But admitting thus much, there is an end of the objection alleged against such an arrangement, from the deviation which it implies from the established order of events. True, indeed, it is, that a distinct revelation, in order to be such, must be supposed to interfere in some degree with the ordinary course of nature. Ends are attainable only by means; and the means adopted must, in all cases, have reference to their specific object. A uniform and universal appeal to the moral feelings and reasoning powers of the human race, can be made only through the medium of one out of two distinct channels, oral or written communication. The adoption of either course on the present supposition implies a miracle, for the first promulgators of the presumed doctrines, even granting that they avail themselves of merely natural instruments for the delivery of their message, must of course be themselves specially inspired. To allow, however, the probability of one single miracle in this case, involves effectively the necessity of others. The Providence which once thus specially interferes with mankind,

must also be presumed to watch over its own arrangements, and to secure their adequate operation. It is not necessary to follow the obvious course of this argument into all its branches, to show that the practical form into which every real revelation must eventually settle, (because that form is the only one which could be equally efficient in all ages, and in every portion of the habitable globe,) is that of *written* expositions of the Divine will, definite in their form, and authoritative in their manner. Oral instruction, in order to be rendered uniform in its doctrines, and universally accessible to all conditions of mankind, would require an interminable continuity of miracle, which nothing less than the most inevitable necessity of the case would justify us in expecting. But the promulgation of a written revelation is like the single act of the creation of the universe, a miraculous agency at the moment, but which, having once taken place, leaves subsequent events to pursue their natural and established course.

If, then, it is not unreasonable to infer that God has, on some occasion or other, communicated his will to mankind, and if among the various professed revelations which have appeared at different periods of man's history, one only has come to us supported by an overpowering weight of evidence, whilst it has at the same time been productive in its effects of a vast, though confessedly incomplete, renovation of the human character, we have undoubtedly the strongest reasons for believing that revelation to be the true one. It is true that many persons may be found who, whilst they assent to the general probability of the fact of *a* revelation, will find what they imagine to be substantial objections to every religious theory which thus far has assumed that character. But objections of this kind are almost always traceable to the old fallacy, which has just now been alluded to, of dictating imaginary schemes of creation to Providence, instead of directing our judgment by what we know

to be actually established. We are all of us unwilling to suppose the interposition of any seemingly elaborate means between the enunciation of the Divine will and the attainment of its end. But the great lesson taught us by experience is, that the anticipations of our judgments are ever more hasty than the course of God's proceedings. Why the workings of his providence move thus slowly, and by a thus apparently intricate process of contrivance, we cannot hope to explain, but we are experimentally certain that such is the fact. Those persons, then, who are inclined to believe generally, that God may, not inconsistently, communicate his will to mankind, and who yet are offended by the specific mode which the believer in Christianity asserts to have been actually adopted by him, would do well if, instead of building visionary schemes of presumed possibilities, they would but ask themselves how, *admitting the actual circumstance of human nature*, they can conceive the possibility of such a communication by any less improbable vehicle than that now supposed.

The appeal to human conviction must be made in some way or other, and yet every way which we can imagine must be attended with its respective apparent improbabilities, of which those who are disposed to cavil may readily take advantage. The candid mind will of course make its option on the side which presents the smallest sum total of difficulty; and we have no hesitation in asserting, that upon a full examination of the circumstances, that side will be found to be the one which assumes, in the first place, that the fact of *a* revelation of God's will is intrinsically probable: and secondly, that the only professedly inspired documents, bearing the apparent stamp of authenticity, are those of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. This latter proposition it will now be our object to demonstrate to the best of our power.

In attempting to speculate upon the internal pro-

bability of the truth of any alleged communication from heaven, the mind is necessarily compelled to occupy a peculiar position, and to lay down, at starting, certain primary propositions, without the admission of which it is obviously impossible to proceed. To derive our data from the facts which in this late period of the world are passing daily before our eyes, would evidently be irrelevant and unphilosophical. We must be prepared to meet with deviations from the presumed established laws of the creation, as a matter of course. At the same time, our experience of the fixedness and uniformity of the ordinary operations of nature, forbids our assuming that Providence, under any circumstances, would be unnecessarily lavish in the operation of miracles. So long as they might be wanted to give the first impulse in the launching of a new system, they might reasonably be looked for; but such operations as are obviously within the competency of natural causes to produce, might on the other hand be expected to occur, according to the more ordinary process. It is on this principle that a new scale of probabilities will suggest itself to the inquirer into the internal evidences of revelation. It would be a manifest contradiction to look for a perfect analogy between the first creation of a system, and its subsequent ordinary cause of operation, and yet the necessary deviation from order, thus occasioned, would not, it may be presumed, be disorderly. In other words, the quantum of necessity would be the measure of the quantum of miracle to be calculated upon. It is indeed manifestly impossible for the human mind to act upon this rule with any thing approaching to accuracy, and yet perhaps we may approximate to it sufficiently for the purpose of conjecturing how far the miracles, recorded in any given form of revelation, appear worthy of a wise Providence, and calculated to produce their respective objects. Every person at all acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, will perceive how strikingly this

observation applies to the preternatural incidents which we find there related. There is nothing in the miracles of the Bible which in the slightest degree, reminds us of the monstrous wonders of the imaginative works of fiction. Be the narrative true or false, at all events the admixture of preternatural occurrences is exactly, on all occasions, kept down to the strict necessity of the case, and natural instruments, where available, are made to contribute their share towards the production of the event. This preliminary observation it is quite necessary that we should make, in order that it may be distinctly understood what is the kind of probabilities which, in the course of the ensuing observations, we shall endeavour to trace in the narratives of the Old and New Testament. No Christian, who recollects the inscrutable mysteries which envelope Deism itself, will shrink from avowing the strict analogy which, in that respect, exists between the religion of unenlightened reason, and that of the Gospel. He knows that every particle of matter, every intellectual perception, teems with wonder. But still it should never be forgotten that the prevailing spirit of Scripture, even in its highest excitement, is that of unostentatious sobriety, and that a calm, candid, and teachable frame of mind is that which is alone adapted for taking a comprehensive view of the whole system of revelation, and pronouncing judgment upon its internal probability.

CHAPTER V.

Of the Mosaic History of the Creation.

To begin, then, with the scriptural account of the creation of the world. The doctrine of the past eternity of the universe is a necessary consequence of the principles of Atheism. If there exists no Creator,

it obviously follows, that all things must have been, from all eternity, precisely what we find them to be at present; in other words, owing their being to an inherent principle of self-existence, they could never have undergone any modification or change either from internal or external causes. Every fact, however, derived from the experiments of scientific men is directly at variance with this supposition. If there is one conclusion in philosophy more certain than another, it is that the universe around us, and the globe which we inhabit, must have had a beginning. Nor is this all: with regard to the latter, we know not only that it has emanated from some creative power, but that it has received peculiar modifications from time to time, which, by the beneficial effects resulting from them, mark the continuing superintendence of a wise and benevolent mind. The present condition in which we find it, has evidently been produced at no very remote period from our own time. The several chronometers supplied by the regular operation of existing phenomena on the surface of the earth, all coincide most remarkably with the date of the creation, as recorded in the Mosaic writings. Every discovery of the geologist supplies the same inference, so far as it refers to the history of the human race. Be the antiquity of the material mass of the globe what it may, and allowing the utmost latitude to the calculations of those who conceive that the various stratifications of the earth must have been the result of an almost infinite succession of slow deposits and diluvian submersions, still it is admitted by all parties, that the first appearance of man must be considered as subsequent to all other formations of animals, and to all important modifications of the mineral world, with the exception only of one single diluvian action, which appears to have taken effect at a later period.

That there is a broad and general appearance of agreement between these facts and the Mosaic nar-

rative, cannot be denied, whatever difficulty we may find in reconciling the scriptural account of a six days' creation with those longer epochs of time which geologists have generally considered necessary to account for the successive stratifications of the soil, and the production of the inferior animals. Now the question is, whether this general accordance be sufficient, even presuming the conclusions of geologists to be correct, to justify our belief in the Divine inspiration of the scriptural narrative of the creation? This question we may surely venture to answer in the affirmative, when we recollect that the exclusive object of revelation is to inculcate a moral lesson, by making us acquainted with the spiritual position of man, with reference to the Deity, and not with the comparatively unimportant facts of natural history. That Scripture, indeed, should wilfully falsify any narrative of circumstances, and gratuitously introduce fable, where the plain truth would be equally intelligible, it were impiety to suppose. But surely we may admit that there would be nothing inconsistent with the Divine perfections in touching only generally and incidentally, and with a certain allowance for the ignorance of an unphilosophical age, those portions of its narrative, which are rather necessary accompaniments than any integral and component part of the main subject matter. We may ask, moreover, if it be required of Scripture that it should always, when referring to merely physical phenomena, relate the real and precise fact, "*with the received opinions of what age of the world would those facts accord?*" Human theories, we should recollect, are continually changing in proportion to the progress of discovery; and what would appear to be a philosophical truth to-day, may, in many cases, be an exploded falsehood to-morrow. Had Moses, for instance, inculcated the doctrine of the Cartesian vortices, that circumstance, which in the seventeenth century would have been considered as the strongest proof of his inspiration,

would have been a decided refutation of it in the latter part of the eighteenth. Were strict philosophical accuracy, therefore, to be required as a necessary test of an inspired narrative, it is obvious that it would really be in accordance with no one possible period of the state of human knowledge, unless we can suppose that the time will actually arrive in which experience will have no more to learn, and the whole process of investigation be completed. If, then, even revelation itself would be justified from the necessity of the case, in stopping short of this extreme point, why, it may be asked, should we expect it to do so at one period more than another; or rather, why should it not at once adapt itself, so far as it can do so consistently with the substantial communication of truth, to that state of knowledge which prevailed at the time when its communications were first made? Such would appear to be the course necessary to make itself practically intelligible to the parties addressed, and, as a choice of difficulties, would seem to be the least objectionable, because the most really useful mode of proceeding.

Still, however, after making due allowance for this necessary principle of accommodation, facts, we conceive, may be traced in the Mosaic narrative, which would seem to announce an acquaintance with some of the phenomena of the universe, as substantiated by subsequent discovery, which it would be difficult to account for in any other way than that of a presumed express inspiration. It is true that speculation upon these points, where the subject matter is confessedly so mysterious, and upon so vast and intricate a scale, ought to be indulged in with extreme caution, as liable to the exaggerations and false conclusions of an excited imagination. Experimental science, which is always progressive, must ever be an equivocal auxiliary to the fixed and immovable truths of revelation. Still, however, as infidelity has for the furtherance of its object, availed itself of pre-

sumed inaccuracies in the scriptural records of the creation, there cannot surely be an impropriety in pointing out, with all due diffidence, a few of the facts there asserted, which would seem to accord in a striking manner with the discoveries of modern science; or with what might be conjectured as probable with reference to the early condition of a world such as ours, and the condition of human nature when existing under strange and unwonted circumstances. In addition, then, to the preceding general remarks on this subject, we may observe, in the first place, that the surface of the globe immediately after the time of its first formation, is asserted by Moses to have been nearly that of semi-fluidity. Now that such must have been the case is considered by geologists as a matter of perfect certainty. But it may be urged that the proofs of this circumstance are so visibly impressed upon the whole surface of the earth that Moses might easily have arrived at that conclusion, even though we suppose him to have had no more than the common knowledge of a tolerably careful observer of nature.—Be it so. Still it remains to be shown by what happy coincidence it was that the order of the successive productions of the Creator, commencing in the inferior races of animals, and advancing onward from fishes and birds to quadrupeds, and from quadrupeds to man, should have been asserted by him in a series so nearly, if not exactly, corresponding with that in which the discoveries of geology have shown them to have occurred. It is impossible to suppose him to have been possessed of facts, gleaned solely by a regular process of scientific induction, sufficient for the establishment of this theory. Was it then a mere fortunate guess, or are we not rather justified in referring his knowledge to the higher source of inspiration?

Another remarkable seeming accordance, to say the least of it, with the recent discoveries of science, in a branch of philosophy which depends, for its very

existence, upon the perfection of our modern optical instruments, occurs almost at the very commencement of the Mosaic narrative. Let it, however, be here again observed, that we allude to these facts as *primâ facie* coincidences merely. Ignorant as mankind are, and as they are probably for ever destined to remain, of the real nature of the remote heavenly bodies, it is evidently impossible that we can venture to found upon the assumptions of modern science any thing more than a vague general surmise, with regard to what may be the true theory of that mysterious portion of the universe. It is, we repeat, only because infidelity has let pass no opportunity of directing the presumed discoveries of science against revelation, that we feel ourselves justified in using arguments of the same description in its defence, so far as they may be fairly available. The coincidence to which we now allude, appears to us a striking one: let the reader attach to it what degree of credit he may conceive that it deserves. Every person conversant with the scriptural account of the creation must have been to a certain degree perplexed by the fact that Moses asserts light to have been called into existence on the first day, and yet expressly declares that the sun and moon were not created as luminaries until the fourth. This statement, at first sight, has the air of singular and glaring inconsistency, which it would seem to be impossible to reconcile with truth. If we consider the writer of the Book of Genesis as an impostor, or a fanatical theorist, attempting to impose his own wild speculations upon the world, we cannot possibly imagine a statement less likely to suggest itself to the author himself, or less calculated to secure proselytes. And yet the observations of the late Sir W. Herschell afford us reason to believe, as is well known, that a process is at this moment going on in the system of the heavenly bodies precisely analogous with this statement of the Mosaic writings. That celebrated astronomer, in his paper addressed to the Royal

Society, in 1811, on the subject of the celestial nebulæ, has given the history of his own observations carefully followed up during the course of a long life. He has there shown that those irregularly shaped and widely diffused masses of light, which under the name of luminous nebulæ, had long attracted the notice of scientific men, and which are known to exist in vast numbers, in various parts of the heavens, are, by a regular process of gradual condensation, made to approach more and more to a spherical form, until, having acquired a bright stellar nucleus, and losing their remaining nebulosity, they finally assume all the definite brightness of a regular fixed star. From the uniformity of this operation, so far as it has been remarked, and from the vast multitude of instances in which it has taken, and is still taking place, it seems natural to infer that a large portion of those stars, whose places have been recognised in the heavens from time immemorial, derived their first origin from the same process. But it is also the generally received opinion, that the sun of our own planetary system is a star precisely of the same nature with the rest; and if so, it seems not improbable from analogy, that it derived its present form from the same cause of condensation, and that its original state of existence was that of a thin luminous fluid, occupying a vast portion of the orbits of those planetary bodies of which it is now the centre. It is surely not a little remarkable, that what might a century ago have been quoted as a seeming absurdity and oversight in Scripture, should be found thus signally to accord with one of the most curious discoveries of modern astronomical science.

CHAPTER VI.

Of the Longevity of the Antediluvian Generations.

ANOTHER peculiarity in the scriptural account of the early period of the world, which, for convenience sake, we shall allude to somewhat out of its regular order, is the remarkable longevity which it attributes to the antediluvian races. This is a statement so little accordant with existing experience, that we believe it to have not unfrequently startled sincere believers in the general veracity of the Mosaic writings, whilst it has, undoubtedly, seemed to afford a handle for triumph to the declared sceptic. The case must be admitted to be a perplexing one; yet still we think that we can perceive reasons derived from the condition of mankind at that early epoch which would seem to make such an arrangement a not improbable result of the decrees of a wise Providence. Every well-founded criticism upon the internal evidence of revelation, we must again remind our readers, must be built entirely upon the admitted phenomena of human nature, both moral and physical. We must necessarily suppose that God willed the early civilization of mankind, but, as we have no reason to believe that the intellectual faculties of man, from the time of the fall of our first parents, were other than what we know them to be at the present moment, we must necessarily suppose that the earliest generations required precisely the same secondary helps to knowledge which, under similar circumstances, would be most available to their latest descendants. Now the objection of the sceptic, on this occasion, is founded upon the mere gratuitous assumption, that what appear to us to be the fixed laws of nature, must always have been such, even when the strongest necessity and the most urgent expediency required their pro-

visional modification. It surely can be deemed no very bold assertion, if we assume that the rule of internal probability would rather incline us to adopt the opposite conclusion. Admitting the present three score and ten years, which are usually considered as the average maximum of human life, to be sufficient for every substantial purpose for which God has thought fit to place us in this world, it is still perfectly obvious that so contracted a term would have been quite insufficient, in the first commencement of society, to enable the human race to attain at any tolerably early period, to that quantum of cultivation for which it is impossible not to perceive that his Creator intended him. Let us suppose, then, the first inhabitants of the earth existing, not only without the more abstruse sciences, but without those simple rudiments of knowledge necessary for the accommodation of society in its ruder state, and let us consider what would be the different results of two distinct arrangements; the one allotting to the human individual a term of existence little short of one thousand years, and the other cutting him off at the present more contracted date. It is evident that knowledge, in the former case, would, from the vast accumulation of facts, increase, as compared with the latter, in almost a geometrical proportion. There we should find the experienced head of a family communicating to successive races of descendants the hoarded experience of centuries, whilst, according to the other supposition, we might expect to see the first commencements of knowledge cut off periodically in their very germ, and generation succeeding to generation with no better lights of science than the transmitted abortive attempts of persons whose lives have terminated almost before their really effective education had begun. It would, of course, be the height of presumption to assert that this is the real explanation of the remarkable dispensation of Providence now alluded to. It cannot, however, be

doubted, that allowing to the early race of mankind the same average faculties possessed by their descendants, such would be the very dissimilar degrees of benefit produced by the two different systems here supposed. How, then, would it be advocating an improbability, to suppose that a benevolent Creator may, under a special emergency, have peculiarly adapted the operation of secondary causes, for a limited period, to the wants of his creatures?* Be,

* It seems perfectly certain, from what we know experimentally of the nature of the human faculties, that man at his first creation must, for some short time at least, have depended for his animal existence upon the special superintendence of his Creator in a manner to which we find nothing analogous in the existing order of the universe. All well-informed persons, whether sceptics or believers in revelation, are agreed in admitting that the human race were first introduced into our planet at a comparatively recent period of time. What then was the condition of the aboriginal parents of mankind at the moment of their first production? The case admits of only two suppositions; they were either children or adults: in either supposition a miracle, or what is equivalent to a miracle, was necessary for their support. Had they been children, it is self-evident that they must have perished within a few hours after their creation, unless sustained by some such providential interference as that now supposed. If they were adults, the result would have been the same, although the argument from which we derive that inference may be somewhat less palpably obvious. All the practical knowledge which we arrive at through our bodily senses is, we know, derived solely from experience. A human adult, waking for the first time to the consciousness of existence, with all his animal faculties in full vigour, and under the most favourable circumstances of climate and bodily comfort, would be as incapable as a new-born infant of availing himself, by any natural effort, of the means of sustenance, however liberally spread around him, and would perish before he would have acquired the knowledge requisite for the support of life. He would possess eyes, but the impression of external objects upon the retina would convey no definite ideas: he would have limbs, but they would be useless for the purposes of locomotion. He would want every conception of space, distance, solidity, vacuity, &c. In addition to this, he would be debarred from the faculty of the communication of his feelings by speech. It is manifest, that under such circumstances, life could be maintained only by the direct intervention of some guardian power, either instilling miraculously that practical knowledge which, under ordinary circumstances, is the result of long experience only, or else directly providing for his physical necessities, as they successively occurred. That the human race does exist at this moment, is a proof that some such special care as that now supposed must have been extended by the mercy of the Creator to the parent stock from which we are descended. It is, therefore, perfectly vain and unphilosophical to assume what may have been the physical circumstances of the world in in its infancy, from what is at this moment passing before our eyes. So far from inferring them to have been the same with the present course of events, we are compelled to suppose that they must have been in many

however, this as it may, it is certain that the inspired historian pleads neither this nor any other reason as an explanation of the seemingly anomalous fact which he records. He seems to compose his narrative merely ministerially, and without the insertion of a single comment. We detect in it nothing of the interested advocate, striving to show the real internal probability of a startling proposition. No mode of writing, assuredly, carries with it more of the air of real inspiration than that where the facts stated appear at first sight incongruous and anomalous, but lose, upon subsequent reflection, much of their apparent improbability; and where the writer himself appears to be perfectly unaware of the value of the truths he is communicating. Whether this observation will apply to the case now before us, may be matter of opinion. It is one, however, which may, with certainty, be extended to many striking passages both of the Old and of the New Testament.

respects essentially different. So fallacious is the argument derived from our own mere personal experience in these mysterious questions. With regard to the use of language, it seems difficult to imagine that it could have been possessed by the earliest generations of mankind, excepting through the aid of Divine instruction. This surmise, which the acknowledged circumstances of our nature seem to point out as the only probable solution of a great metaphysical difficulty, seems to derive some warrant from the statement given in Genesis ii. 19. "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof."

CHAPTER VII.

Of the Fall of our First Parents.

THE most remarkable and perplexing part of the Mosaic narrative of the early history of the human species is that which refers to the original condition in Paradise of our first parents, and to their subsequent fall. As this event constitutes the very foundation upon which the whole structure of Christianity is built, and as it has afforded not only the great object of attack to Infidels, but has also been a source of the most discordant opinions among the various denominations of Christians, it will be expedient to examine it in some considerable detail. On a subject, indeed, so profoundly mysterious, it would be absurd in the extreme to hope that any examination of ours could suggest any satisfactory explanation of what is manifestly beyond the reach of human reason. All that we can attempt to do is, to take the few facts related by Moses in as literal a sense as possible, keeping out of sight, at the same time, all the traditional notions which, without any authority of Scripture, have, in the course of ages, been attached to them by human ingenuity; and then to inquire how far what we find to be actually stated as matter of fact accords with the established and acknowledged phenomena of human nature. In order to come to a perfect understanding on this point, it will, of course be necessary to examine our moral constitution, such as, from our own internal consciousness and our intercourse with mankind we know it experimentally to be, and to observe how far it bears any traces of that degradation which we are told has been thus inflicted upon it, subsequently to its first production by its Creator. Now there is not, perhaps, a single *Theist, or even* Atheist, who will not, on this subject,

assent implicitly to the definition of our nature as afforded by revelation. "The heart of man is evil from his youth." Is this, we ask, or is it not, the strict truth? It matters not for the present argument how such happened originally to be the case. The question is one of practical experience. "The good that I would, I do not," says St. Paul, "but the evil which I would not, that I do." Here is the assertion of an abstract perception and preference in our minds of what is good and honest, continued with an actual practical bias and predisposition in our carnal feelings, to act directly in contradiction to our better judgment, which we have no hesitation in asserting, that every human being has occasionally perceived within himself from his first infancy. Is, then, this strange collision, which we all feel, between our moral sense, and the suggestions of our animal nature, curable by any inherent power of spiritual exertion lodged within ourselves? The very terms of the proposition already stated, supply at once an answer to this question. If the preponderance of our nature is evil, it cannot be supposed to supply any effectual medicine for its own cure; and if so, the necessity of some external dispensation, like that of the Gospel, for the removal of this original, and, by us, incurable taint, would appear to follow as a matter of course. It would signify nothing, we repeat, as to the argument of our need of some express mode of reconciliation with God, how this disease of sin was originally introduced into man's constitution, f the fact of its actual existence there be once well established. Let it have been impressed upon each individual distinctly and specially at his birth; let it have been the original modification of the human heart; or let it have been the acquired consequence of some act of indiscretion in our first parents, the consequence to ourselves will, at all events, be precisely the same. The fact that we are all of us far gone from righteousness will still remain unimpeached.

In this point of view, then, the recorded history of the fall of our first parents is a matter of speculative curiosity rather than of real moment. We might naturally wish to know whence this strange and anomalous moral arrangement took its origin, but the practical result to ourselves would remain the same, be our theory with regard to that origin what it might. Man, undoubtedly, as a moral agent, prefers evil to good. This is more or less true with this or that individual, but it is still, in a great degree, certainly true of all. Even the best men will occasionally recognise, within themselves, a kind of inconsequential reasoning, which they know to be false, whilst they yield to it: a species of morbid appetite to do precisely that which conscience tells them to be sinful. But with regard to the great mass of mankind, it is truly fearful to think how vast is the extent of depravity, which is kept within tolerable limits, and is rendered compatible with the existence of social order, only by the restraints of public opinion, or by the fear of the magistrate. It is true, indeed, that to the eye of the careless observer, the external aspect of society, for the most part, appears sufficiently smooth; but it is because in every civilized country the superincumbent weight of civil government and conventional decorum keeps down that tendency to resistance which is sure to manifest itself the moment that, by change of circumstances, an opportunity for so doing is afforded. But the principle of morals, we should recollect, has much less to do with external actions than with internal motives. It follows, therefore, as a necessary consequence, not only that a man may be a grievous sinner before God, whose conduct in society has afforded no handle whatever to actual censure, but, also, it is an obvious proposition, that his internal and substantial guilt (his external actions continuing precisely the same) will ever advance progressively in atrocity, precisely *in proportion* to the degree of positive better know-

ledge against the dictates of which he shall be deliberately offending.

This proposition being admitted, the conclusion is inevitable; namely, that, *so long as the original corruption of the heart continues undiminished, every advance in moral and religious knowledge will necessarily be an advance in guiltiness.* Precisely on the same principle by which we blame that ferocity in the uncultivated savage, which we consider a mere animal instinct in a beast of prey, and excuse that conduct in a savage which would be deemed unpardonable in a civilized heathen; so, the same deadness of spiritual feeling, which would be a matter of course in the latter character, would attach an awful responsibility to the well-instructed Christian.—Knowledge, then, is the source of guiltiness: increase of knowledge to any class of beings, whose instinctive predisposition is such as to incline them to prefer knowingly the worse to the better principle, is virtually and substantially an increase of guilt. Such, then, is the fallacy of the argument which would attribute to man the faculty of healing by his own natural powers of moral exertion, with no better guide than his intuitive perceptions of right and wrong, the evil which we find to have been, in some way or other, inflicted upon his spiritual nature.

Having made these preliminary observations, let us now consider the narrative of the fall of our first parents as given in the Mosaic writings, and observe how far it accords with the anomalous constitution of the human heart, as established by our own experience. In discussing this subject, it is no easy matter to detach ourselves from the associations arising from early oral expositions, and the theories of rival controversialists, and to fix our attention singly and exclusively upon what has been actually revealed. Perhaps no one theological fact, in consequence of the momentous interests connected with it, and the train of poetic ideas which it is so well

calculated to suggest, has suffered more from the admixture of extraneous human theories than the one before us. The very small space occupied in Scripture by the narrative of the fall of man, when compared with our own multifarious conceptions on the subject, may afford a salutary hint to the mind of every well disposed person, of the danger incident to us all, of mistaking our peculiar intellectual speculations and the traditions of our infancy for revelation tself, if we do not take care to secure the accuracy of our notions, by measuring them carefully from time to time, with what we find to be expressly written. It is obvious, that if we would discuss this, or any other mysterious theological question, with accuracy and fairness, we can do so only by abiding, as closely as possible, by the strict letter of Holy Writ, interposing our own speculations solely where they appear to follow as necessary inferences from the acknowledged language of the original document.

In the first place, then, we may observe, that the Book of Genesis does not seem to assert that our first parents were created in their own proper nature, immortal, though it appears certain that, had they retained their obedience, they were not only capable of, but actually destined for, an incidental and conditional immortality, the consequence of their repairing the decay of their bodies by the fruit of the tree of life. This last species of immortality, though a real and effective one, is still different in kind from that which would result as a necessary consequence from the original constitution of the corporeal frame. In the one case mortality would follow, from the mere circumstance of withholding the necessary aliment: in the other it could be superinduced only by introducing an entire change of the animal habits and functions. What, therefore, would have been the ultimate allotment of mankind had the fall never taken place, or had some occasional individuals amongst the descendants of Adam only fallen into

sin, and our first parents escaped from pollution, is a matter of mere conjecture, on which it were as unwise, as it is unnecessary, to hazard an opinion. It appears, moreover, in the second place, that however morally superior our first parents may have been in consequence of their unblemished innocence to their guilty posterity (and vast undoubtedly that superiority was) still with regard to the general scope and compass of their knowledge, they were inferior, not only to their own offspring, but to what they themselves subsequently became in their fallen and guilty condition. So far as we can judge from the very short statement given in the Book of Genesis, man, at his first creation, was the first of terrestrial animals, highly and admirably fitted for his situation, by the possession of many appropriate blessings, and possessed of that exact degree of understanding which was calculated for every purpose of harmless, and, probably, of refined enjoyment; and yet he appears to have been left without that intuitive moral sense, which, by inculcating the nice and eternal distinctions of right and wrong, renders us capable of sinning, from the simple fact, that it exclusively suggests the rule by which we apprehend our duty. It is clear that this last mentioned faculty might have been kindly withheld by the Creator, on account of the fearful risk attending upon a gift so critical and so easily abused, and yet that a vast residue of intellectual endowment might have remained for the purposes of harmless enjoyment, as the allotment of the human race. Almost all the arts which add to the social happiness of life, a very large portion of the pleasures of imagination, and all the treasures of experimental knowledge, might have been possessed in a high, perhaps in an exuberant degree of perfection, by creatures untainted by sin, because unendowed with that peculiar apprehension which alone creates the capability of sinning. Such a constitution *of human nature, in* its original state, would

seem to harmonize exactly with what might be pr sumed as probable with regard to the allotment o the surface of this globe, of the most perfect portio of God's earthly creation. Certain it is that revel tion seems expressly to imply, that man did not acqui the knowledge of good and evil until the moment o his transgression of the Divine prohibition. And is a remarkable confirmation of this view of the sul ject, that the first and immediate consequence of hi disobedience was a newly acquired sense of propriet and decency which he had not possessed in his stat of innocence. "The eyes of both of them wer opened, and they knew that they were naked." A the same time, it would appear that their anim passions became depraved as their moral apprehen sions were enlarged, and thus begun that struggl between carnality and better knowledge, which ha descended from them in such fatal proportion to thei guilty posterity. We may also observe, in confirma tion of the supposition here hazarded, namely, tha man attained to an enlarged state of moral appre hension by the fall, though by that acquisition h destroyed the just equilibrium of his original an more happily blended nature, that this view of th subject appears to be sanctioned by the expressio which Moses puts into the mouth of the Almight with reference to that event:—"And the Lord Go said, Behold, the man is become *as one of us*, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also the tree of life, and eat, and live fo ever, therefore the Lord sent him forth from the garde of Eden," &c.

The purport of the Mosaic account then appears t be, that what really occasioned the fall and ruin o our nature, or in other words, the introduction of ou present incongruous and anomalous moral constitu tion, and of sin as a necessary consequence, was th *acquisition* of an accurate knowledge of the distinc *tions of right* and wrong, by a creature not originall

fitted for its reception, and, therefore, incapable of making a proper use of it. That such a change could not be a subject of approbation with a God of infinite moral purity, and in whose sight the amplest endowments of intellect can be valuable only as they are found to cooperate with the great principles of duty, is obviously certain. The evil spiritual beings so frequently alluded to by Scripture, no doubt, possess intellectual powers far beyond those at present allotted to the human race, but, assuredly, such faculties serve only to enhance their depravity. It should, however, be remembered, that although moral knowledge, so long as it is likely to be abused by its possessors, must be admitted to be a fatal acquisition to any beings, and especially to such as may have been placed in that happy state of innocence enjoyed by our first parents; it is still, in strictness, not only a good in itself, when properly employed, but also a good, absolutely necessary as a constituent for the happiness and perfection of the higher order of beings. From the certainty of this fact, then, we may, perhaps, venture humbly to surmise why this seeming anomaly was allowed by a wise and good Providence to occur in his creation. Why, it is asked, was not man precluded from the possibility of taking the fatal step which produced his fall? It were presumptuous in us to attempt to answer this question, excepting in the strictest form of diffident conjecture. Still, however, we know from the words of the two inspired apostles, Paul and Peter, that the expiatory atonement of Christ was prepared in the councils of Infinite Wisdom before the foundations of the world were laid. We are, therefore, justified in inferring, that when the Creator in his mercy condescended to forewarn the parents of the human race of the imminent peril in which their violation of a salutary admonition would involve them and their posterity, he not only foresaw their disobedience, but also prepared an arrangement for averting from them the

consequences naturally resulting from it. And not only may we, in conformity with the strict letter of Scripture, infer thus much, but we may also indulge in a reasonable expectation that the change which has thus taken place in the allotment of mankind will ultimately prove to have been rather a gain than a loss to such persons as shall have duly availed themselves of the means afforded for their restoration, and that the redeemed servants of Christ will be found to have exchanged the humbler condition of simply happy and innocent beings upon earth for a preeminent state of moral apprehension, and of exquisite enjoyment in heaven, far exceeding that of the station which they have lost. It is very remarkable that two favourite and ingenious apologues prevailed among the heathen philosophers of antiquity, both of them having reference to the introduction of evil by the acquisition of knowledge, and which would seem to have been suggested to their inventors by the scriptural narrative of the fall of our first parents. The beautiful fable of the guilty curiosity and subsequent wanderings of Psyche, until her final reconciliation with her divine husband; and that of Prometheus, particularly as it is given in the terribly splendid drama of Æschylus; each of them clearly point to this important fact. If not actually derived from Scripture, they, at all events, show, by their remarkable coincidence with one another, and with the Mosaic history, that the hypothesis to which they refer is a correct inference from the philosophy of morals.

Such, then, is the account which the Bible gives of the first origin of those strange anomalies in the moral character of human nature, the real existence of which, as essential phenomena demonstrably attaching to us, the most determined infidel must at all events admit, however he may be disposed to question the mode of their first introduction. Here, then, it remains to be asked whether, granting our consti-

tution to be actually such, there is any intrinsic improbability in the account thus given. The great and staggering improbability is, that man should be what we find that he is. This, however, is not a point which admits of discussion. It is a simple matter of fact, respecting the certainty of which it is impossible to doubt. Such, then, being the case, the question really at issue between the believer and the sceptic is, whether it is more consistent with our notions of the probable proceedings of Providence that the discordant principles which are known to exist within us should be supposed to have been superinduced at a period subsequent to man's creation, than that he should have originally proceeded, such as he now is, from the hands of his Maker. This is surely a point upon which, independently of the authority of revelation, it were presumptuous to form an opinion. But certainly there is nothing contradictory to sound reason in supposing the former to have been the fact. That the flesh is found experimentally to be at variance with the spirit, suggests, at all events, a presumption that they were not fitted originally the one for the other; whilst, at the same time, admitting the truth of the scriptural theory, that this life in its present modification is intended to be a state of probation, the secondary arrangement which has thus been allowed to come into operation is found to harmonize with all that we can infer as the most probable solution of other difficulties connected with the mysterious dealings of Providence. To the misrepresentation, then, of the infidel, who asserts it to be the doctrine of Scripture, that the eternal perdition of all mankind is a just retribution attaching to each individual of the human race for one single act of disobedience committed in the persons of their first parents, the answer is obvious. Scripture inculcates no such doctrine. It tells us, indeed, (and every Christian is bound to admit the strict accuracy of the assertion,) that by one act of disobedience sin came

into the world, and by sin, death. But such would also have been equally the case had the first human beings derived to themselves, and transmitted through their own persons to their descendants, a knowledge of moral good and evil, with a mechanism of corrupt passions, by any other specific process than that recorded by Moses. So long as our sense of right and wrong is accurate, whilst, at the same time, the spirit of disobedience is strong within us, sin, however at first introduced, will continue to prevail; and where sin is, there its natural consequences must be presumed to follow, unless such a result can be shown to be superseded by some effectual counteraction, such as every Christian believes to be afforded by the expiatory merits of his Saviour. Of one thing we may be quite certain, namely, that had any other explanation of the first origin of sin and death been given to us, it would have been as unsparingly criticised, and as dogmatically rejected by the sceptic, as that which we are taught to receive as the correct historical fact. At the same time, we may venture confidently to assert, that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the imagination to invent a theory more exactly accordant with what we know by experience of our own nature, than that which has thus come to us under the presumed sanction of revelation.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of the History of the general Deluge, and the Confusion of Tongues.

FEW, if any, physical facts appear more difficult to account for, upon any known principles of experimental science, than that of the general deluge, as asserted in Scripture; and yet, perhaps, there is not one of those which do not fall within the course of our own actual experience, the absolute certainty of which is more completely demonstrated by the traces left of its existence upon the surface of the globe. It is the opinion of most geologists that several submersions of the crust of the earth, in whole or in part, have taken place from time to time in the course of the order of nature. All of them, however, appear to be unanimously agreed that one deluge at least, answering exactly to that recorded by Moses, did certainly prevail at a period subsequent to the creation of the present races of animals, whose relics are still found in vast abundance in the most recent strata. It is, therefore, perfectly vain to start objections, derived from abstract speculations of our own creation, against the physical possibility of an event, the certainty of which has been thus substantiated by irrefragable evidence. From the case in question, however, we may at all events derive an important lesson with regard to any sceptical doubts which, from the presumed certainty of the conclusions of experimental science, we may feel disposed to entertain on the subject of other perternatural occurrences related in the Holy Scriptures. Were we to have recourse to theory alone, we no doubt should have little hesitation in pronouncing upon the extreme improbability, *not to* say the impossibility, of a deluge, *such as that which* we read of in the writings of

Moses. Voltaire, who took up this ground, but whose knowledge in experimental philosophy was too superficial to render his objections formidable, asserts boldly the demonstration of the falsity of the scriptural narrative. "The *physical impossibility*," he says, "of a universal deluge by any natural means is *proveable by the most rigorous demonstration*." It is amusing to observe that he lays down, as the first principle on which to build this rigorous course of proof, the palpably unfounded assertion, that the average depth of the ocean does not exceed 500 feet. Upon the assumption of this position, accompanied by the gratuitous one that the relative depths and elevation of the bed of the ocean, and of the adjoining continents are, under all circumstances, incapable of any variation, the necessity of the conclusion to which he would arrive seems indeed sufficiently obvious. In answer again to the supposition that the submersion of the earth to the depth asserted by Scripture, could be produced by rain discharged from the atmosphere, it has been shown by other writers, (and in this case, on correct philosophical principles) not only that the time required to produce such a mass of water from that source would be much longer that the scriptural account would appear to allow, but also that even if the entire atmosphere with all its contents, were condensed into water, the whole volume, thus produced, would not occasion a deluge much exceeding thirty feet in height. In the hope of meeting this objection, other theories have been suggested from time to time, such as that of a change in the inclination of the earth's axis, an alteration in the rate of its diurnal rotation, the attraction of a comet, and other causes of a similar nature, founded upon the presumed established facts of modern experimental science. It is, however, generally admitted that none of these ingenious and well-intentioned suggestions are in all respects satisfactory. After all we must be content to learn on this, as on almost every

other theological subject, a lesson of salutary humility, and to abide by the demonstration which we possess of the actual certainty of the recorded event, without hoping to explain what resources Divine Providence may have in store, in the magazine of secondary causes for the operation of its ends.

> "There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreampt of in your philosophy."

Still, however, without attempting to propose any thing like a solution of the difficulties which beset this subject, we may venture to observe, that the assertion, which has been so confidently made, that the whole globe of the earth, and the whole atmosphere united, do not contain a sufficient quantity of fluid for such a submersion of the earth, as that related in Scripture, is any thing rather than borne out by the most accurate calculations of men of science. Scripture declares that the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep was made to co-operate on that occasion with the descent of rain; or, as it is styled in revelation, the opening of the windows of heaven. The present proportion of the surface of the sea, as compared with that of the land, is generally estimated as two parts in three. With regard to the actual extreme depth of the ocean, nothing can be inferred beyond probable conjectures. No soundings, from the operation of well known causes, have ever descended much beyond a mile, but there is strong reason for believing that the mean depth very far exceeds that amount. There would, perhaps, be no improbability in the supposition which would consider six miles as the mean depth. Be that, however, as it may, there is every reason to suppose that the solid surface of the earth has, subsequently to its creation, undergone violent changes affecting its partial elevation and depression. Were then the present bed of the ocean raised by any strong subterranean action, to the level of the adjoining

continents, the deluge produced would most probably at least equal that related by Moses; or again the same effect might in great measure be produced by the depression of the land itself; or in the third place, we may imagine both causes cooperating on the occasion alluded to. The most plausible surmise we can make, both with reference to the language of Scripture, and in explanation of existing phenomena, seems to be that some important change was produced at that important epoch upon the surface of the globe, by which the relative proportion of land and sea became permanently altered. What that change was, however, it is difficult, if not impossible, to form a well-grounded opinion. There appears to be some warrant in Scripture for the supposition that rain was unknown in the antediluvian ages. At least the appearance of the rainbow upon the subsidence of the waters of the deluge, is described in a manner to leave the impression of its being the first occurrence of that phenomenon; and with regard to the state of the world before the fall of our first parents, it is expressly asserted that "no rain fell from the heavens in those days, but there went up a dew which watered the ground," whilst no intimation is given that this state of things was altered till the time of the deluge. We can, however, account for the absence of rain upon any known natural principles only, by the supposition that the proportion of sea, as compared with that of dry land was much less in the antediluvian ages, than it has been subsequently to that crisis. The diminished evaporation which would take place under such circumstances, would apparently produce the result now supposed. So long as the earth was only thinly and partially peopled, such a state of things as that here surmised would not be incompatible with the wants of mankind, though it would be perfectly inconsistent with the general diffusion of population over the whole globe. The change which took place at that same period, in the average duration of human

life, would also seem to indicate some alteration of a permanent character in the condition of man's abode upon earth, less favourable to our animal powers. That change, we may observe, though immediate in a very great proportion, was not total and complete, till after the lapse of a considerable time subsequent to Noah: a circumstance which well accords with the hypothesis above stated, since it is natural to suppose that the stronger stimulus of vitality would not yield immediately to the operation of changes in climate or other similar causes, but would adapt itself gradually, and through successive generations, to its new position, until it had reached the maximum of depression, at which it would remain stationary. This, however, with all the foregoing conjectures, be it remembered, we give strictly and simply as such. Most probably, after all, they are very far from meeting the real difficulty of the case. The real and substantial proofs of the Mosaic deluge are the records of its occurrence indelibly and unanswerably impressed upon the earth's surface; and they are completely satisfactory. If we have ventured to add any confirmatory suggestions of our own, let them be considered as intended rather to show the utter futility of the objections of the infidel, than to throw light upon what, at least in the present state of science, must be considered an inexplicable mystery.

The confusion of languages at Babel is the first important event related in Scripture, as occurring after the period of the deluge. The Mosaic statement is altogether so mysterious as scarcely to admit of any explanatory conjecture. It may, however, be incidentally observed, that if we take into consideration the known instinctive attachment of mankind to their native soil, their tendency to congregate together in large communities, and the destructive feuds which would arise in an overcrowded population, where each person would be rather disposed to expel his neighbour, at any cost, than to remove the incon-

venient pressure by his own voluntary emigration, we can scarcely imagine any means so well adapted to counteract what, at that peculiar period of the world, would have operated as a mischievous propensity, and to promote a voluntary colonization in other districts without either animosity or bloodshed, as the introduction of the momentary inconvenience resulting from the misapprehension of each other's language. Scripture, it is true, does not assign this or any reason, for the miracle; of course, therefore, it can be mentioned only as a mere surmise, founded upon the known propensities of human nature, and upon the assumption that Providence avails itself, for the most part, of existing secondary causes, for the furtherance of its ends, which it would be absurd to advance with any degree of confidence.

CHAPTER IX.

Of the internal Probability of the peculiar Revelation of the Divine Will contained in the Jewish Scriptures, and of the moral tendency of that Revelation.

It is certain that the natural tendency of the human heart, in the absence of any external religious stimulus, such as that of a positive Divine revelation existing under solemn and authoritative sanctions, is to fall into a total forgetfulness of its Creator, and an indifference to all but corporeal objects. This is one of those truths, for the reality of which we may confidently appeal to the whole past experience of mankind. Man, from the period of his first existence, appears necessarily to have stood in need of some mode of direct communication with his Maker, it being perfectly demonstrable that there is nothing in the resorts of unassisted reason capable of filling up that void in our moral and intellectual faculties which would be left by the substraction of the aids of reve-

lation. When this last help is wanting, the total degradation of our nature is the invariable consequence. On the other hand, we must be prepared in candour to admit, that as such a systematic communication with the Divine Being, as that now assumed to be necessary, implies nothing less than the operation of a continuity of miracles, there is certainly, at first sight, a semblance of improbability, and, as it would almost appear, of clumsiness of contrivance, in a system which would seem to require the constant direct interference of its Author for the preservation of order, or the prevention of derangement. Here, however, as before, we are precluded from the adoption of our own more plausible theories, as to what things ought to be, by the obstinacy of unanswerable facts. In discussing the arguments for and against revelation in general, we are reduced to the necessity of choosing between two alternatives. We must either, in the one case, suppose human nature to have been left by its Creator entirely to its own moral and intellectual resources, in which event we see nothing before us but the most fearful state of spiritual abandonment and degradation; or, on the other hand, we must be ready to admit the probability of some direct interposition of Providence, inculcating some positive code of moral laws; and thus coming, to a certain degree, into collision with man's free agency, and the seemingly established order of the universe. Actual and uniform experience, we repeat, has shown the total untenableness of any intermediate theory. It is evident, however, that the difficulty here is full as great (if not infinitely greater) on the side of scepticism as on that which assumes the necessity of a system of revelation for our spiritual guidance. We see, it is true, no *à priori* reason why man should have been created such as he is, but being such, our course of argument, in order to be correct, must adopt that admission as an elementary truth. *Now, if the* report of Scripture be correct, the

course which Providence in its wisdom has pursued from the first, has been to arrive at its important object, the elevation and instruction of our species, by the least possible deviation from the ordinary course of events, and by interfering, in the smallest degree possible, with the free-will of man. A revelation, under some form other, appears from the commencement of the world to have been offered to, but never obtruded upon, mankind. The human race have ever been left free to adopt or to reject, to make their election between good and evil. In every successive age, accordingly, the primitive distinction between the sons of God and the children of men seems to have existed. The Almighty has uniformly disclosed himself sufficiently to be found out by those who seek him, but insufficiently for the apprehension of those whose minds have been otherwise employed in the selfish pursuits of mere worldly enjoyment. Such, according to the Mosaic account, was undoubtedly the condition of the antediluvian generations; such was that of the early patriarchal ages; such was that, on a more extended scale, of the Jews, under the Levitical institutions; and such it is at the present moment in the consummation of revelation under the Christian covenant. In no one period has God left himself without some record of his existence and attributes; the blessing, indeed, has been unequally diffused, and whilst a large portion of mankind have been allowed to continue with no other spiritual guidance than that of their own instinctive moral sense, some few select communities have been set as a beacon on a hill for the diffusion of the light of revealed truth to all who were disposed to profit by it.

Now it were indeed presumptuous to say that Providence has selected this as the only possible course between conflicting difficulties: but it is at least incumbent upon those who calumniate this arrangement as both partial and inadequate for the occasion, to show how the first elements of sound religion

could have been kept alive during a long course of ages of comparative barbarism, with any thing *less* than this presumed degree of direct Divine interference, or how human free agency, which constitutes the basis of every rational notion of religion, could have been compatible with *more*. Truth we know to be uniform and self-consistent, but the human powers of the apprehension of truth vary with every modification of society, and with every progress of knowledge. What exact degree of revelation, therefore, is adapted to meet the circumstances and wants of our nature, under all its possible varieties of aspect, is a problem much too intricate for mortal wisdom to solve. The divine mind, which knows all the internal machinery of our hearts, is alone equal to that task. One thing, however, even *we* may venture to assert, namely, that the brightest effulgence of revealed truth is not fitted for the earliest and rudest state of human existence. Under such circumstances neither could its momentous value be duly appreciated, nor its records adequately and correctly transmitted, to succeeding times. The very immensity of the importance of Christianity, then, as a final and complete system of revelation, would obviously seem to require that its first communication to mankind should have been postponed until the world, from the more advanced state of knowledge, should be prepared to receive it. But, upon this supposition, what might not be the pernicious effects produced by a total suspension of the communication of Divine knowledge upon the religious habits of society in the ages antecedent to such a communication! We know sufficiently, from past history, to what a thoroughly debasing state of irreligion and idolatry the human mind necessarily descends, in the absence of the adventitious help of revelation. Here, then, appears the absolute necessity of some intermediate form of revelation, of some provisional system less perfect than that destined ultimately to supersede it, but still worthy of Divine

providence, and well adapted to cooperate with the existing state of knowledge, and the varied gradations of society, in the earlier portion of man's history. Such an arrangement, admitting the Divine origin and the correctness of the history of Christianity, we should naturally look for, and such an arrangement, the Old Testament assures us, did accordingly exist. But the system pursued by Providence is always one of strict uniformity with itself, and the leading characteristic of that uniformity is the availing itself of the operation of secondary causes, so long as those causes are adequate, for the accomplishment of its purpose. Even in a system, therefore, of positive miraculous interventions, we should, in reason, expect to find no gratuitous or superfluous display of miracles. This, again, accords exactly with what we read in Scripture. The light of true religion was not allowed to become extinct during the long course of ages which preceded Christianity, but still the strict necessity of the case was the measure of the actual deviation from the ordinary course of natural events. This remark will serve to account for, and to justify, that appearance of partiality in the selection of individual persons and tribes, as the vehicles of revelation, which characterizes the earlier recorded intercourse of God with his creatures. In the antediluvian and patriarchal ages religion could have been diffused over the whole human race, only by a series of continuous miracles, inconsistent, so far as we judge, with the usual purposes of the Divine government. On the other hand, the selection of first a single family, and afterwards of a single nation, as the depositaries of religious knowledge, appears to be a far less startling deviation from the usual order of nature, whilst, from the singleness of purpose, of which such an arrangement was more peculiarly capable, it was likely to be more efficient for the preservation and accurate transmission of those truths, the perpetuating of which was so essentially important.

If, however, there is nothing repugnant to reason in the supposition that certain individuals, in the earlier period of the world, might have been selected as instruments for the guardianship of revealed truth, it would also appear probable, that the rule which would direct the choice of this or that person would not be merely the moral excellence of the parties thus chosen, but also their peculiar fitness, from other adventitious circumstances, for the task thus entrusted to them. This observation, if correct, will serve to explain some apparent anomalies in Scripture, resulting from what is there related of the characters of some of the influential personages whose history it records. It is reasonable, indeed, to suppose, that the Divine Being, in making his selection of the persons whom he destined to be the depositaries of his will, would give the preference to those whose piety and good conduct would seem specially to entitle them to that high distinction. And such, in fact, appears to have been the case, with regard to his choice of the first founders of the Israelitish nation. In the circumstances related of Abraham, we recognise the traces of one of the most singularly amiable and pious dispositions on record. Of Isaac little is related, but that little is calculated to afford the same favourable impression of his character; and if in the early history of Jacob we cannot but recognise some traits of human infirmity, all that is recorded of the latter period of his life is, at all events, precisely such as we can imagine to be likely to conciliate the Divine favour. Still, however, we should recollect, that both these men and their descendants were, in fact, only the machinery by which the Almighty accomplished his will, and that the distinction thus conferred upon them had not any necessary and inseparable reference to their personal deserts. This observation, so far as it regards the Jews, the Old Testament, with a remarkable caution, as if specially to guard against the *possibility of* misapprehension, repeats again and

again, reminding them that they were a stiff-necked generation, chosen for no merit of their own, but merely as instruments in the hand of Divine power, raised up for a specific purpose, and forming, almost unconsciously, a necessary link in the chain of the arrangements of Providence. The degree to which this unquestionable fact has been overlooked by the enemies of Christianity, is another strong proof, out of the many, of the extreme unfairness with which infidelity has brought its charges against revelation. It is in vain that Scripture deprecates this misapplication of its doctrine; that it asserts the absolute equality and impartiality of God's moral government, and that it relates from time to time the tremendous penal inflictions which befel these seemingly favoured men, where their moral demerits called down the visitation. The handle is too plausible a one for the adversaries of revealed truth to relinquish, and they have, accordingly, down to our own time, uniformly availed themselves of it: with what regard to accuracy and legitimate argument, let those judge who have most anxiously studied that mysterious volume so much calumniated, but so little understood.

Granting, then, the necessity of a series of provisional and comparatively imperfect revelations of the Divine will prior to the full developement of Christianity, and assuming, as we have done through the whole of the preceding argument, that God's ordinary course of proceeding is that of availing himself of the established course of secondary causes, and even of turning the bad passions of mankind to account for the production of good, and the furtherance of his own gracious designs, we surely cannot but remark a consistency, and a strong confirmatory internal evidence, in those peculiar modes of revelation which the more ancient historical books of the Old Testament assert to have taken place in the early ages: a consistency, because it accords exactly with what we have every reason to infer of the deal-

ings of Providence at the present moment; and an internal evidence, because, though we conceive the system pursued to be entirely in harmony with the real order of the universe, we admit it to be unlike what any inventor of a fictitious revelation would be disposed to have suggested as probable. There is a homeliness in the aspect of real truth which almost always startles us at the first aspect. It is only upon collecting our thoughts, and taking into consideration the whole bearing of the case, that we begin to see its appositeness and intrinsic superiority to those delusive creatures of our own imaginations, which are so apt to impose themselves upon us as philosophical principles. The question, then, now before us is simply this. The sceptic objects to the Holy Scriptures that they describe the Almighty as specially protecting, for a long succession of ages, select bodies of men who, for aught that we can perceive, had little in their personal characters to recommend them to his favour above others, whom the sacred historian passes over in silence. Even supposing that we assent to the accuracy of his statement thus far, we entirely deny the inference which he would derive from it. We reply, that he himself, if he be really a Theist, acknowledges the existence, at this moment, of an all-wise and benevolent Ruler of the universe, and we challenge him to try revelation by the same test which he applies to the existing order of nature. Does he profess to doubt whether it can be consistent with the Divine perfection to bring about its ultimate purposes by what we call natural causes, and to avail itself of human passions, and even the incidental infirmities of human nature for the procuring of ultimate benefits? We repeat, that the whole chain of history, modern as well as ancient, secular as well as scriptural, answers this question, respecting the mode of God's government, in the affirmative. It is no justification of human guiltiness *that the worst vices* of mankind have often, in direct

opposition to the intention of the parties, led to most beneficial effects upon society; but we know that such have been the hinges upon which some of the great influential epochs of human improvement have turned. "It is necessary that offences should come, but wo unto them by whom they come." Such is the language of the book of revelation, which on this point accords exactly with the book of nature. Few stronger proofs, perhaps, of the predominance of the good over the evil principle in the regulation of the universe can be quoted, than this very tendency, by which beneficial results are often seen to emanate from the most apparently deleterious causes. Admitting that the Divine mind presides over, and directs the current of human events (and on this point the theistical sceptic and the Christian are alike agreed,) what difference can it make with reference to that substantial fact, in what form of words we enunciate it as a certain proposition; whether we say with the secular historian, that particular events followed particular causes, or with the inspired penman, that God raised up this or that individual, this or that nation, for the special accomplishment of his will? If we see nothing to stagger our reliance upon the Divine goodness in the fact that the vices of the Roman conclave raised up a Luther, or that the licentious passions of Henry VIII. planted the Protestant Reformation in England, why should we be offended if we find revelation, when giving the details of the government of the same Almighty Being, recognising a principle which presents no handle for censure, when considered as a branch of natural theology?

> "If plagues or earthquakes break not heaven's design,
> Why then a Borgia, or a Catiline?
> Who knows but He, whose hand the lightning forms,
> Who heaves old Ocean, and who wings the storms,
> Pours fierce ambition in a Cæsar's mind,
> Or turns young Ammon loose to scourge mankind?"

When Bolingbroke suggested to Pope the sentiment

contained in the foregoing lines, in support of his theory of natural religion, he saw nothing in it which his reason did not assent to. It was only when he came to turn his attention to the evidences of revelation that he perceived, or fancied that he perceived, its unsoundness.

It is in vain, then, for the deistical impugners of Scripture to profess to be offended by the admitted vices of the Jewish people, or of some of the remarkable personages recorded in Holy Writ, as inconsistent with the moral attributes of that Providence which is there declared to have raised them to a high state of temporal elevation, so long as they confine themselves to that single charge. Were they, indeed, able to point out in the sacred writings, any one line expressing approbation of those vices, or attempting to throw a veil over the occasional imperfections of even the more brilliant characters of the inspired history, the objection would be undoubtedly fatal. The direct contrary is, however, notoriously the case. That revelation gives an impartial portraiture of poor infirm human nature is perfectly true, and the faithfulness of the resemblance to what we have all experienced, is a strong confirmation of the authenticity of the description. True, indeed, it is that the successive events there related are given simply and undisguisedly, as they appear to have occurred, precisely as those of any other class of human beings, might be delineated by their respective historians; but the narrative has this peculiarity, which, without derogating from its accuracy, distinguishes it from all other historical records whatever; *it never loses sight of the great fact of a Providence which superintends all human events:* a fact, we repeat, which, if secular writers believe in, they have no right to adduce as an argument against Scripture, and which if they do not believe, then they do not come within that description of persons to whom the present course of argument is addressed.

Can, then, the sceptic produce an instance in which the sacred writings speak of any positive deviation from the rules of morality in any other terms than those of censure? That he can do so, we expressly deny. Would he allege as an instance in point, the intended sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham?—for even that noble and affecting example of holy faith has been calumniated as a trait of ignorant and sanguinary superstition. The answer here is obvious. If Scripture be really what it asserts itself to be, the word of God, the morality of this specific case at once establishes itself by the mere statement of the fact. Nothing can be more palpably certain, than that He, who is the great author of life, has an undoubted right to resume his own gift; and, consequently, that not only was that act of unshrinking obedience meritorious in Abraham, as a proof of his faith, but also that an exactly similar line of conduct would, at this moment, be imperative upon ourselves, provided the command could be as certainly and explicitly conveyed to us in our own case as we believe it to have been to him in his. Here the only point at issue is, as to the degree of proof of the reality of the Divine commission: admit that, and the scriptural inference follows as a matter of course.

The sanguinary executions inflicted upon the idolatrous Canaanites again have been dwelt upon with persevering acrimony of vituperation by those who would prove the Scriptures of the Old Testament to be the production of a barbarous and cruel period, and obviously unworthy of their assumed Divine origin. Here the fallacy, as in the case of so many other questions of this nature, depends entirely upon a garbled and imperfect statement of the facts. If the Israelites received no commission to inflict these tremendous punishments upon their neighbours, then, indeed, the charge against the Deity falls to the ground, but upon that supposition the Scriptures have misstated the fact, and the Israelites themselves

deserve the deepest reprobation. If, however, on the other hand, the assertion of a special commission from the Almighty, for that purpose, has been correctly made, that admission at once justifies the fact. Here, again, we refer the consistent Deist, to his own principles. Granting that the destruction of the Canaanitish idolaters must be referred directly to God himself, and not merely to the appointed instruments of his will, it remains for the unbeliever to show in what single circumstance this occurrence morally differs from other undoubted acts of Divine Providence, where, for some great and perhaps untraceable purpose, the engines of destruction have been extensively employed. Looking to the sacred historian, why does the opponent of Christianity, whilst he makes this specific charge, neglect to include, in the same censure, the almost entire extirpation of the human race, by the universal deluge, or the overthrow of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities? Looking to secular history, how does he account for the occasional visitations of pestilence, of famine, of earthquakes? How does he reconcile with the government of a wise and benevolent ruler of the universe, the destruction of Pompeii, of Herculaneum, of Stabii, in ancient times, and of Messina and Lisbon in modern? Will he argue, that it aggravates the charge against Scripture, that the Canaanites are declared to have been justly punished for their *crimes*, whilst we know of no peculiar enormities, beyond those attaching to their neighbours, which we can lay to the account of the last-mentioned cities, which have been thus consigned to destruction? Again we repeat, the interposition of the mysterious veil which, in modern times, screens from our view the direct workings of the Deity, and obliges us to refer the course of events to contingent and secondary causes, makes no real difference in the practical argument. What is certainly true of the God of nature, is as assuredly true of the God of the

Scriptures. If, notwithstanding the startling character of surrounding circumstances, the philosophical rationalist can maintain his faith in the former unshaken, he cannot, consistently with his own creed, impugn the dispensations of the latter.

But let us examine this charge, which, by some persons, is thought so seriously to shake the authority of revelation, more in detail. The believer in Christianity maintains that it was absolutely necessary, for the general welfare of mankind, that the last remnant of the only true religion upon earth should be kept from total extinction, either by the operation of one continued miracle, or by the cooperation of secondary causes, during that dark and protracted period which was destined to intervene between the first settlement of the Israelites in Palestine, and the eventual promulgation of the covenant of the Gospel. The prevention of the contagion of idolatry by the extinction of the idolaters, he contends, was the only really efficacious means for attaining this end, and thus demonstrates, in the first place, the expediency of the measures recorded to have been adopted. That those measures were consistent with the rules of morality, and with the Divine justice, he proves, in the next place, by referring to the numerous acts of infanticide, the human sacrifices, and other fearful abominations, acknowledged to have been practised by that denounced people ; and lastly, that the measure now under discussion was not a deviation from the usual course of the government of Providence, h shows, by referring to the extensive inflictions whicl on other occasions, and even within our own time have been allowed to befal various portions of t' human race. Unless the Deist can point out a st stantial distinction between the admissions contair in his own mode of belief, and these assumptions fr Scripture, his argument obviously proves nothi *But, neither* is the whole of his objections, nor *whole of our* vindication of this portion of revela

comprehended in the preceding remarks. He argues, that the making any set of human beings delegated commissioners for the execution of the divine judgments, especially in the case of the speculative points of theology, is, in itself, such a handle afforded to religious persecution, that we cannot conceive so dangerous a doctrine to have proceeded from the hallowed source of inspiration. To this we answer that the precedent here supposed could be in point only upon the recurrence of exactly similar circumstances, and in the case of a special Divine warrant; but the former of these suppositions implies an impossibility, the latter an extreme improbability. On slighter grounds than these, no real Christian would, any more than the philosophical Theist, advocate the right of extirpating by the sword erroneous doctrines of religion. But it will be said that the parties deputed on this occasion, as the ministers of vengeance, were themselves nearly equally culpable with the very idolaters (and even in the self-same acts of irreligion) for whose punishment they were sent. Admitting this assertion to be correct, which, however, remains to be proved, still, if it mean any thing, it would show that, as all human beings are liable to error, therefore no human beings are capable, in strict justice, of receiving a commission for inflicting any penal retribution upon others. Here, again, we appeal to those principles of common usage and obvious expediency, admitted equally by both parties. Can the objector, in this case, recal to his recollection no instances perfectly accordant with the soundest reason and policy, of civil or military discipline, where one peccant individual is made, for the sake of the example which it affords to himself, the instrument of punishment upon his more culpable confederates? It has been uniformly asserted through the whole of the preceding arguments, and we see no reason for being ashamed of the doctrine, that the *mode of Divine* government, with reference to man-

kind, as revealed to us in Scripture, is ever found to be in strict conformity and adaptation to the machinery of human passions. In other words, that God's dealings with mankind are fitted for mankind. The mere punishment of the Canaanitish idolaters, we have reason to believe, was not the sole nor the main object of the awful executions now alluded to. Other nations, both in ancient and modern times, have, we know, grievously sinned as they had done, and yet have been allowed to await the ordinary and procrastinated course of the Divine judgments. The real end aimed at on that occasion was, no doubt, the warning and example afforded by these means to the wavering Israelites themselves. And most fearful and appalling must that example have proved to their own chiding consciences. Whether the lesson thus practically taught them, respecting the grievous crime of idolatry, was more severe than the actual circumstances required, is best shown by considering to what degree, after all, they did really escape the contagion of irreligion, communicated by their neighbours. Now we know that the apostasy of even these chosen delegates of Divine retribution was, at several periods of their history, all but complete. As, during their wanderings in the desert, they looked back, with regret and longing, to the coarse servile fare of Egypt, so, during a large portion of their residence in the promised land, they envied and imitated the gross worship of their idolatrous neighbours, and were retained within the limits of something resembling the pure religion taught from Mount Sinai, only by an external circumvallation of rites, and isolating usages, too well contrived for even their wayward obstinacy to break through. In the latter period of their history, immediately preceding the Chaldean captivity, to such an extent had the principle of irreligion prevailed, that if a remnant of true *believers still* existed, it was a remnant in the strictest *application* of the term; men chased from society

and herding in woods and rocks, from the persecution of their apostate sovereigns. Still it is remarkable that *the surrounding darkness never completely closed over that remarkable country, to the total extinction of the light from heaven. The machinery employed by Providence for the furtherance of its purpose exactly performed the work required and no more.* Had one degree less of severity been adopted, had the Mosaic ritual been rendered less exclusive, and the spirit of nationality less earnestly forced upon them, it cannot be doubted but that the principle of evil would have finally prevailed over them, and our blessed Saviour at his coming, would have had to preach the holy doctrines of the Gospel to a people unimbued with the first notions of sound theism. "When ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you. *And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone.* As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, *will I rule over you.*" Before, then, we charge the denunciations of the Mosaic code against acts of idolatry, as sanguinary and unjustifiable, or its ceremonial institutions, for the furtherance of the same object, as vexatious and trifling, let it at least be shown, that a slighter effort, on the part of the legislator, would have attained the required object. If this cannot, as assuredly it cannot, be proved, then the only conclusion to which we can arrive, from the whole bearings of the case, is, that after all, the means adopted were only just adequate to the emergency, and that what has been set up as an accusation against the truth of revelation on this occasion is, in reality, an additional argument of the wisdom in which its *various integral parts* have been arranged.

CHAPTER X.

Of the Moral Tendency of the Levitical Institutions.

But the defender of the inspiration of the Mos writings will not be content to rest his cause sol upon exculpatory arguments. Those compositic profess to be the dictation of almighty wisdom; a if that assertion be correct, we may reasonably exp to find, in the character of their precepts, some int nal proof and indication of the pure source from wh they emanated. Now, on this point, the course l fore us is an easy one. Christianity, we know, w not introduced into the world until after the expi tion of at least four thousand years from the ti of its creation. During that long period, with t single exception of the patriarchal families, previc to the era of Moses, and of the Jewish nation, su sequently to that time, the human mind had to fo its own opinions upon the great questions of religi and morals, from the conclusions of the light of nat only, unless we admit also the not improbable su position, that some remnants of original traditi contributed their aid towards the formation of t schools of ancient philosophy. Let, then, the infi give us, in support of our argument, the single bo of the Old Testament, or even the writings of Mo only, and let him take the full benefit of all the oc sional sublime morality, and all the theology, whi he can find in the works of the philosophers a moralists of heathenism, from the earliest period history down to that of the ministry of Christ. I doubt he will find there much which every Christi *will admire* and approve, for we have St. Paul's o *warrant* for the assertion, that there was enough

soundness in the wisdom of those remarkable men, to render the plea of ignorance unavailable to those who, notwithstanding such helps, continued in the commission of sin. Still, however, we may confidently challenge the Augustan age itself to produce, if it can, by selection from all the works of all the ancients, a code of morals and theology, at all approaching in excellence to that contained in the single law of Moses, written, be it remembered, almost in the world's very infancy, and when Greece and Italy lay, as yet, immersed in the deepest barbarism. Had we, in fact, nothing to produce but the Decalogue itself, we should feel no anxiety for the issue of the challenge. It may be said, indeed, with reference to this last observation, that the doctrine of the unity of the Godhead, and the great laws of social morality, may be found as fully and explicitly stated in the works of the better heathen ethical writers, as in those Two Tables. But, admitting that the more obvious injunctions and prohibitions may be as clearly expressed elsewhere, the existence of the second and tenth commandments would, we think, completely bear out our case. Other legislators may have asserted the unity of the supreme Being, and his claim to priority of worship: but we very much doubt whether any precept, excepting that of Moses, can be quoted, which anticipates the first commencing germ of the principle of idolatry within the heart, by pointing out and guarding against the tendency to polytheism, produced by the toleration of a more limited veneration of inferior beings; or which, after denouncing the various overt acts of positive and practical immorality, proceeds to subject the mere latent wish, the unripened, and, as yet, unoperative desire to the same uncompromising censure. We learn, from Josephus, the strong effect produced upon the Jewish nation, even at the latter period of their existence, by the prohibitive injunction of the second commandment of the Decalogue, in the case of the

resistance which they made to the innovations of Herod, upon the mere introduction by him of trophies, bearing a very rude resemblance to the human form, within the walls of Jerusalem; and we cannot but contrast the beneficial result of this feeling of extreme caution on so nice a point in that people, with the gross abuses which have eventually attended seemingly harmless deviations from the strictness of this rule in the instance of the Church of Rome. It was surely no human wisdom which, at so early and dark an era as that of Moses, detected one of the most deceitful principles of the human breast, and anticipated the coming mischief by a cautious and effectual prospective enactment. Let us take another instance in point. Even in the writings of Cicero we find the Stoic Balbus introduced, as maintaining the theory of the divine nature of the sun, and the other heavenly bodies, and of their claim to our reverence as such. Such was the purest form of theology at Rome, at a period little antecedent to our Saviour's nativity. Nor can any one read the alleged conversations of that truly remarkable man now alluded to, with his contemporary philosophers, on these sublime subjects, without perceiving how much more the great questions of religion appear to have been considered by them rather as matters of curious and abstract discussion, than as any thing in which they, as responsible beings, had a vested and most momentous interest. In opposition to such cold and unprofitable skirmishing of the intellect, let us quote the surprisingly vivid and soul-stirring appeal of the Jewish legislator on this self-same point. "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep, therefore, and do them, for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a *wise and* understanding people. For what nation

is there so great, which hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, and hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons and thy son's sons. Specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children. And ye came near and stood under the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire. *Ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude:* only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commands you to perform, even ten commandments, and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whether ye go over to possess it. Take ye, therefore, good heed unto yourselves; *for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto me in Horeb, out of the midst of the fire, lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air; the likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth, and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun and the moon and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them*, which the Lord thy

God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven."*

"Crudele gladiatorum spectaculum et inhumanum *nonnullis* videri solet, *et haud scio an ita sit* ut nunc fit," is again the cold-blooded remark of the above-mentioned accomplished Roman philosopher, on the subject of the atrocious amusements of the amphitheatre, at the period of Rome's highest state of social refinement. Compare with this the following noble, sublime, and beautiful passages from the Mosaic writings: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."† "When ye reap the harvests of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest; and thou shalt not glean thy vineyard:—thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger. I am the Lord your God. Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning. Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but shalt fear thy God. I am the Lord. Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. I am the Lord."‡ "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them; thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again. If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young; but thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well

*Deut. iv. †Gen. ix. 6. ‡Lev. xix.

with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days."* "No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge, for he taketh a man's life to pledge. When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee. And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: in any case, thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: *and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the Lord thy God.* Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates. At his day shalt thou give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: *lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee.* Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless, nor take the widow's raiment to pledge; but thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing. When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, *thou shalt not go again to fetch it;* it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow; that the Lord may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow; and thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, therefore I command thee to do this thing."† There is no need of apology for the length of these

* *Deut. xxii.* † Deut. xxiv.

truly beautiful extracts. We will add one short passage more, which is remarkable, when we consider the oppressive Egyptian bondage from which the Israelites had recently escaped, for the truly Christian feeling of generosity and forbearance which it expresses. "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother; thou shalt not abhor *an Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land.*"*

It is quite impossible, we conceive, to read these splendid touches of kindly feeling and sublime piety without acknowledging their immeasurable superiority to any of the most elaborate productions of Pagan civilization. And if so, the inquiry, naturally follows, "To what are we to attribute this superiority?" Grant the inspiration of the passages in question, and the difficulty is at once removed. But without the aid of this satisfactory solution, the exquisite morality which marks these most ancient of all human compositions must be admitted to present an anomaly which it seems perfectly impossible to account for upon any natural principle.

We may observe, also, as another striking internal evidence of the authenticity of these singular records, that the beauty of the religious and social principles which they inculcate is in direct contrast with what we find, from the same sources of information, to have been the practical habits of the parties to whom they were addressed. Highly wrought and delicate sentiments of humanity and of chastened piety appear, in the ordinary course of natural events, only among nations very far advanced in intellectual improvement; because such productions grow out of the existing state of knowledge and manners; or where the literature of the people outsteps, by any accident, the habitual state of manners then prevalent, some traits of the general barbarism are, at all events, distinguishable in it. But what we read in the books of

* Deut. xxiii, 7.

Moses of the moral and intellectual attainments of the Israelites has nothing which at all harmonizes, or is in keeping with the sublimity of their religious code. Now this singular contrast between the sacred literature of that nation, and the character of the nation itself, is precisely what we might expect to find, provided their alleged history be the true one. A system of laws emanating from Heaven must necessarily be supposed to be consistent with the soundest principles of virtue and holiness. But it by no means follows, that the habits of a semi-barbarous and profligate people would immediately conform to the restraint of obligations, so unlike to any thing which constituted their previous standard of morals. The accuracy then of the picture afforded us by Moses on this occasion is, according to the established presumption of the inspired character of his writings, perfectly correct. But how are we to explain the difficulty, if we deny that inspiration? Assume, for argument's sake, that Moses, like some other subsequent legislators, possessed an understanding far in advance of the prevalent notions of his own period. What, in that case, could have been his motive for composing those historical works which bear his name? It is evident that, had his object been merely to make out a plausible case, and to recommend the merits of his own legislation, it would never have occurred to him to state those mortifying facts, which form so large a part of the subject matter of his history; with that plainness of narrative which we find that he has actually adopted. No original projector, and, more than any other person, no legislator, likes to record the failure of his own experiments; much less, if writing a narrative of his attempts to renovate the character of the people with whom he has to deal, does he love to register his own personal defects, and the cases in which he has drawn down the Divine vengeance upon his own head. As it is, the Mosaic writings *present a true*, unfortunately too true, por-

traiture of the waywardness of human nature, and of the impenetrable surface presented by the heart of man to the operation of the principle of holiness; but they suggest any idea rather than that of a successful instructer of mankind attempting to exemplify the importance of his own religious and moral precepts, by showing their practical success in the amelioration of the parties to whom they have been addressed.

But a principle of self-denial, and an unwillingness to make the most of the means, obviously placed within his reach, for the furtherance of his object, if that object were to promote his own personal aggrandizement by the assumption of the legislative character, pervades alike every part of the writings of Moses. Arguing upon mere human feelings and motives, this fact were perfectly inexplicable. The silence, for instance, observed by him, with regard to the hopes and fears of a future state, has given rise to one of the most elaborate and ingenious arguments contained in the whole compass of English literature. And what makes his neglect of this great influential argument the more remarkable, is the certainty of the fact, as appears incidentally by his own allusions to the sin of witchcraft and necromancy, that the doctrine of the separate existence of the soul was familiar to the minds of the people with whom he had to deal. Why, then, did he abstain from urging a dogma of which he could not be ignorant, and which, as an inducement to obedience, is so far the most powerful one that a legislator or moralist can possibly advance? Had self-interest or human policy been his spring of action, it is quite impossible that he should have exercised this forbearance. Admitting, however, his inspiration to have been real, this remarkable fact explains itself. This self-same omission, which would present a strange anomaly in any other code of religion and morals, is, if Christianity be true, an absolutely necessary consequence of the peculiar relative position which Ju-

daism held, as connected, prospectively, with the covenant of the Gospel. If eternal life be (as we are assured that it is) the exclusive result of the expiatory sacrifice of Christ, communicated to mankind through the medium of faith, it is evident that no incomplete and merely preparatory system of doctrine could consistently hold out the promise of that reward which is reserved as the especial sanction of the higher and more perfect revelation. "If," says St. Paul, "there had been a law given *which could have given life*, verily, righteousness should have been by the law; but the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Had, then, Moses inserted in his own legal code a promise of eternal salvation as the reward of obedience to its injunctions, that very promise would be fatal to its authority as an integral portion of the entire machinery of Divine revelation. Taking it, on the other hand, precisely as we find it, the remarkable omission now alluded to is a striking evidence of the strict consistency of the various component parts of Scripture one with another, and consequently a strong internal confirmation of their joint authenticity.

Another very remarkable instance of the forbearance, and (if we were to suppose him to have been actuated only by human motives) of what might be justly deemed the imprudence and inconsistency of Moses, may be observed in the fact, that though legislating for an infant people, whose future national character was intended to be moulded entirely upon the pattern of his institutions, and doing so under the alleged sanction of Divine dictation, he still asserts the mere provisional character of his own institutions, and expressly declares that they were to be eventually superseded by the enactments of some future and more perfect legislator. Here is a contradiction which it were quite impossible to reconcile with any

admitted and ordinary principles of action. What could possibly suggest to any reasonable person, professing to be armed with the Divine authority, and denouncing the most tremendous preternatural visitations against any contingent breach of his enactments, so strange an idea as that of asserting that, after all, the rules which he thus peremptorily lays down are destined to perish, not from the mere destructive influence of time, but from their own comparative inferiority to others which are to be subsequently introduced? The anomaly, upon every view of the question but one, is quite inexplicable. Admitting, however, the truth of the whole series of revelation, as contained in the entire Bible, not only are we obliged to admit the necessity of such an explicit declaration; but, also, we cannot but be struck with the nicety and delicacy of arrangement with which it is introduced. It was obviously desirable at the time of the first promulgation of the Mosaic law, that no slur should appear to be thrown upon the sanctity and solemnity of an institution, which, however temporary in its purpose, was still intended to form the habits and to command the respect of the Israelites, for the space of fifteen centuries, and, during that long period, to serve as a substitute for the more spiritual dispensation, which was eventually destined to occupy its place. Now, a prominent declaration of its merely provisional character would have been, in great measure, destructive of this necessary degree of deferential respect; and yet, on the other hand, had it been held out as a system complete and perfect in itself, such an assertion would have been inconsistent with the truth, whilst, also, it would have operated as a complete vindication of the later Jews in their eventual rejection of the promises of the Gospel. This difficulty appears to have been met with that *exact degree* of wise caution, which marks deliberate *and consistent* contrivance. The introduction of the *Mosaic law*, accordingly, was accompanied by the

most astounding miracles, and its obligatory character established under the most terrific sanctions; and yet the fact of its being intended as a provisional substitute only for a covenant, which was ultimately to supersede it, though never brought prominently forward, is still announced with a sufficient precision of assertion to produce conviction in the mind of any person, who, not content with a mere general survey, would take the trouble of examining its less palpable declarations. In this circumstance we recognise the usual characteristic of prophecy: that is to say, we find a statement not calculated to attract much attention before its completion, and yet which, when completed, is found to be sufficiently precise to satisfy us that its insertion was the result of deliberate foreknowledge.*

* That the future advent of Christ was foretold by Moses, as well as by the later prophets, is not an assumption derived from any forced and over-ingenious construction of those parts of the Mosaic writings which are thus interpreted by Christians. The Samaritans, who acknowledged no canonical books besides the Pentateuch, looked forward to the coming of the promised Messiah no less confidently than the more orthodox Jews. The inferences, therefore, which they derived from these respective passages, were the same with our own. "I know," said the woman of Samaria, in conversation with our Lord, "that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, he will tell us all things." We find, also, in another passage of St. John's gospel, the Apostle Philip bearing a like testimony to the prophetic declaration of Moses on this point. "Philip findeth Nathaniel, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom *Moses in the law* and the prophets did write." And, yet, notwithstanding this undoubted explicitness of allusion to that important event, so guarded is the language of the several passages which bear upon the point, that it may be doubted whether any person unacquainted with the books of the New Testament, and perusing the Mosaic writings for the first time, would necessarily be led by them to cherish the same anticipation. That conclusion would, upon a repeated perusal, be probably found to be a necessary one, but still it would require a certain effort of the attention, and a balancing of consequences, to arrive at it.

CHAPTER XI.

Of the miraculous incidents recorded by Moses.

THE many miraculous incidents which are so inseparably interwoven with the whole series of events recorded in the historical books of the Old Testament, and more especially in the writings of Moses, as to leave no possibility of accounting for them from natural causes, without destroying the whole history itself, have ever, as a matter of course, been a mark for the assaults and ridicule of infidelity. Nor is this all. They have also been a subject of surprise to many sincere believers in Christianity, under the idea that, as the admitted system of Providence is to govern the world by the operation of secondary causes, such seemingly gratuitous instances of deviation from that rule would appear at first sight to convey the idea of the fictitious and exaggerated traditions of a barbarian period, rather than of the strictly accurate detail of real occurrences. But it will be right, on this occasion, to observe, as a preliminary fact, that with regard to the question respecting the possibility or probability of miracles, it is not within the power of even the strongest minds, at this period of the world, to discuss the matter fairly. All our established associations, derived from our unbroken experience of the uniformity of the existing operations of nature, are directly in the way of an impartial conjecture as to what may, under peculiar circumstances, and in a strong emergency, be most probable in the dispensations of Providence. It is a point completely established by metaphysicians, that by a wise adaptation of the constitution of our minds to the phenomena of the world in which we are placed, we all of us have an instinctive tendency to take as our standard of probability, with reference

to future events, our actual experience of the past, and to judge of abstract possibilities solely by the occurrences which have fallen within our own knowledge. This is not the place to dilate upon the process of reasoning, upon which this axiom is founded, nor upon the inference derived from it, which would seem to establish, as a no less certain truth, our utter incompetence to trace any connexion between cause and effect in any natural incidents whatever. Suffice it to observe, that this predisposition in the human mind to scepticism, with regard to any deviation from the usual course of nature, exists within us independently of our reason, and in spite of our reason; and that though it has been given to us as a necessary instinct for our practical welfare in the business of this life, it is one against which we cannot be too much on our guard the moment that we turn our attention to the discussion of the transcendental topics of theology. Whilst under the influence of such a bias as that now alluded to, it is obviously impossible that the miracles recorded in the inspired writings should be perused by us without some occasional misgivings as to the accuracy of the narrative. And yet, at the same time, nothing can be more certain than that this instinctive scepticism is itself founded upon a fallacious, though to us almost inevitable, process of reasoning. When we consider over how very confined an area, even of things as they now are, our own personal knowledge can at the utmost extend, it were obviously the extreme height of presumption in us to assert, that because particular occurrences have not manifested themselves within our own time, therefore, they not only have never taken place in any other period of the world, but are actually to be considered in the light of impossibilities. But we need not rest the credibility of revelation upon this negative argument only. If our present experience tells us one thing respecting natural causes, we may affirm with certainty, that past experience, so

far as we can collect it from history or experimental research into the phenomena of the globe, tells us another. We evidently know nothing of the actions and events of past times but from the records of contemporary writers, and those records expressly assert that deviations from what is now the established course of nature did actually occur at the various epochs to which many of those records refer. If we are told that such testimony is insufficient, because the admission of it would be to allow the assertions of Scripture to prove themselves, and because the events there alluded to were demonstrably impossible, our answer is, that we have irrefragable proofs in the book of creation itself, which the most determined sceptic must admit, that circumstances which would now be deemed impossible have actually occurred at no very remote period from our own time. No combination of materials with which we are acquainted, excepting the natural order of animal generation, would, at this moment, produce the slightest approach to organized life. Not a single feather, not a hair, not a bone is now seen to originate from the spontaneous action of the elements; and yet we know from positive research, that birds, quadrupeds, and man, have been, at their respective periods, called into being subsequently to the formation of the globe which we inhabit, by some creative power, the peculiar exercise of which seems to be no longer exhibited. If we ask why animals are no longer produced by some plastic energy of the vivifying principle, our only answer can be, that for some reason unknown to us, the course of nature has undergone a change. The negative argument then afforded by our own actual experience of the existing order of things is confessedly no refutation whatever of the preceding supposition, supported as it is by incontrovertible facts.

It is an obvious truth, though, strange to say, continually overlooked in discussions of this nature, that

the existence of a creation necessarily implies a Creator, and that if its subsequent ordinary duration may be kept up by seemingly natural causes, the energy to which it owed its first production must have been, in the usual meaning of the term, miraculous, that is to say, a deviation from what are now deemed to be the established laws of Providence. This observation may be applied, with almost equal certainty of inference, to the moral phenomena of human history as to the physical. Prominent and peculiar effects in the circumstances of this or that nation must have had their peculiar and efficient causes. That Christianity exists at this moment is a self-decisive proof that events must have occurred at some definite period, which gave that peculiar direction and impulse to the human character. The same argument extends with equal force to the point more immediately under discussion at this moment, namely, the early history of the Jews. That singular people exists at the present day as a numerous nation, scattered over almost every region of the earth, all of them bearing the same testimony respecting their first origin, and still practising, so far as circumstances will allow, the very rites which the Scriptures declare to have been ordained by Moses upwards of 3000 years ago. Now, as effects cannot exist without their respective causes, "whence, we ask, did this strange community originate, if not from the stock, and under the peculiar agency, to which all existing records whatever agree in referring them?" If the received history is false, what is the true one, and where is it to be found? Should we be told that the books which relate the miraculous events, connected with their first establishment as a people, are the productions of a later period, calculated, like the histories of other dark ages, to gratify national vanity, by the relation of exaggerated or fictitious wonders: the question then occurs, to what period we are to assign these several productions, and how we are to account, not only for the disappearance of all the

really authentic records, but for the substitution of forged documents in their room, which, notwithstanding, have been implicitly received as authentic by the parties thus imposed on. Now, allowing the utmost possible latitude to the conjectures of scepticism on this point, we have the strongest reasons for asserting that the Mosaic writings were not only in existence, but were acknowledged as ancient and authentic documents, before the separation of the ten tribes of Israel under Jeroboam from the two remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The 105th, 106th, and 136th Psalms, which are little more than the abridged details of those narratives, provided they were really the composition of David, to whom uniform tradition has attributed them, would at once warrant this conclusion. The 78th Psalm, a work also of the same presumed date, affords a similar evidence.* But the history of those revolted tribes, and of their successors, the Samaritans, supplies an unanswerable argument on this point. That separation, we know, took place during the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. From that period the most deadly hatred existed between these two separated branches of the Israelitish family, and, accordingly, the subsequent prophetical writings, which were received as inspired documents into the canon of the two orthodox tribes of the kingdom of Judah, were never acknowledged as such by their heretical neighbours, the schismatics of Israel. Both parties, however, received as authentic (with a few interpolations, indeed, on the part of the Samaritans, in consequence of their political prejudices,) the writings of Moses; a fact which would be perfectly inexplicable in any other way than that of the supposition that both equally believed them to be such at the time of the commencement of their schism. But this suppo-

* *In addition to the Psalms* mentioned above, the 44th, 66th, 68th, 74th, *77th, 80th, 81st, 95th, 99th,* 107th, 110th, 114th, 133d, and 135th, all contain *distinct allusions to some of the facts related in the Mosaic history.*

sition at once carries the antiquity of those writings far beyond the point of time to which most impugners of their authority have been desirous of referring them.* It is remarkable, that the modern descendants of the ancient Samaritans still occupy the town of Nablous, formerly Shechem, situated between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, where they were visited, in the year 1823, by the Rev. W. Jowett, who gives the following account of his conversation with their priest. "He (the priest) said they were all in expectation of the Messiah—that the Messiah would be a man, not the Son of God, and that this was the place which he would make the metropolis of his kingdom: this was the place of which the Lord had promised, He would place his name there. We asked what passages of the Pentateuch, according to their views, spoke of the Messiah. He quoted, '*A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up like unto me, &c.*' This promise of the Messiah was not fulfilled in Joshua, for he was not a prophet. Thursday, Nov. 20th 1823.—Early this morning, according to appointment, we visited the Samaritan priest. We waited for him some time, during which we placed in order our Bibles, and selected some texts, on which we desired to converse with him. At length he made his appearance, and accompanied us into the synagogue. With great reverence, he produced the venerable manuscript (the MS. of the law alluded to in Prideaux's Connection, Part I. Book 2.,) which, he said, was written by Abisha, grandson of Aaron, thirteen years after the death of Moses, now three thousand four hundred and sixty years ago. We were not permitted to touch the sacred book, but only to look at it, at about a foot distance. The page at which he opened showed certainly a very ancient manuscript,

* *The theory, that the books which bear the name of Moses were, in reality, a compilation made by Ezra after the Babylonish captivity, is perfectly irreconcilable with the fact of the admission of the authenticity of those books by the revolted inhabitants of Samaria.*

with the characters yet sufficiently distinct. He then showed us another, of a similar form, apparently an exact copy, which, he said, was eight hundred years old. He also produced a few tattered leaves of Walton's Polyglott—part of Genesis. We asked if they did not consider the books of Joshua and Judges as sacred, in the same manner as the Torah; he replied, 'By no means: these two books we have, and we reverence them; but the Torah is our only sacred book. Joshua was not a prophet, but the disciple of a prophet; that is, of Moses.' We inquired in which direction they turn their faces when they pray. He waved his hand in the direction a little right of the angle behind the altar, that is, nearly southward. In this direction is the city of Luz, which was afterwards called Bethel, the place which the Lord appointed to set his name there. As to Jerusalem, they have no respect for it as a holy city; regarding the Jews as their rivals, and speaking entirely in the spirit of the woman of Samaria,* *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, &c.*"†

It is superfluous to observe how exactly this statement accords with the facts detailed in Scripture, and how strongly it confirms the alleged antiquity of the Mosaic books. It has been frequently, and justly, remarked, that the circumstance of the Jews being joint depositaries with the Christians of the Scriptures of the Old Testament in general, is an unanswerable evidence that those writings have not been tampered with and altered by the latter. The argument afforded in confirmation of the authenticity of the Pentateuch, in particular, by this testimony of a sect disposed to controvert that of every other portion of the sacred canon, is precisely similar in kind, and, as it appears to us, not less conclusive, with regard to the writings to which it refers. The pe-

* *John iv. 20.*

† *Jowett's Christian Researches in Syria and the Holy Land*, pp. 196. *et seq.*

culiar creed of this last lingering remnant of the ten schismatic tribes, which is a natural result of the events of their history, if that history be correctly transmitted to us in the Old Testament, it would be impossible to account for, on the opposite supposition of that narrative being false. Admitting, however, its accuracy, the antiquity of the Mosaic writings is at once established, up to a period which scarcely leaves room for the possibility even of their having been nothing more than a successful forgery of some still earlier epoch. The endeavour, therefore, to get rid of the difficulty attending the admission of the miraculous events of the Jewish history, by at once denying their authenticity, will be found upon trial, as in the case of all the other mysterious questions of revelation, to introduce far greater perplexity than it is calculated to remove. We can see, or at all events, imagine, a sufficient reason why, in the course of the dealings of a wise and merciful Providence, such preternatural interferences should have been allowed to occur; but we can discover no end to the embarrassment and entanglement which would be the result of a system of general scepticism, or, in other words, of a theory which would almost oblige us to believe any thing, for no better purpose than that of flattering us with the idea of believing nothing.

It cannot be too strongly impressed upon our minds that, granting the mere fact of the genuineness of the Mosaic writings, without insisting also upon their inspiration, even that admission would involve, as a necessary consequence, the reality of a large proportion of the miracles there recorded. Moses could not, like some modern fanatics, have been under a delusion with regard to the reality of his mission, or of the prodigies related respecting him. If he wrote those books, he was either a deliberate impostor, or a person really bearing God's commission, and endued, upon special occasions, with perternatural power. But *we are not free* to choose between even these

alternatives. He could not have been an impostor if he would. The very nature of the miracles related of him, and by him, were such as to render all imposition impossible. The whole body of the Israelites are asserted by him to have personally witnessed deviations from the ordinary course of nature, on a scale far too great to have been by any supposition within the limits of unassisted agency to effect; and an appeal is repeatedly made to their testimony for the accuracy of the respective statements. The infliction of the plagues upon the Egyptians, the passage of the Red Sea, the miraculous production of water in the Desert, the thunders and lightnings of Mount Sinai during the delivery of the law, the gift of manna, and the dreadful judgment overtaking Dathan and his accomplices, are all related, not as events of remote occurrence, and such as might be safely invented, when the production of all contradictory testimony should have been rendered impossible by the lapse of time; but as facts, for which the great mass of the nation could vouch, as having been themselves eye-witnesses of their reality. In such a case, there is no tenable middle position between absolute denial of the truth of the whole narrative, and its absolute admission in all its parts. Any attempt, therefore, at accommodation of the circumstances related, with the more tranquil course of ordinary nature, is as unphilosophical as it is unsafe. True, indeed, it is, that the prodigies related are of the most astounding description. No consistent advocate of revelation would seek to gloss over this fact. But after all, what does this prove, excepting what every believer in Christianity is, upon principle, bound to admit? namely, that the production of that mysterious system of redemption has been, of all the works of Providence with which we are acquainted, the most important in its nature, and, therefore, if we may venture so to speak of Almighty agency, the most elaborate in its contrivance and appointed

machinery. If our reason can see no possible means of escaping from the recognition of the truth of the inspired records, that same reason, then, must tell us that a dispensation so solemnly prepared, and so consistently, so slowly, and so cautiously developed, year after year, and century after century, must be one, the paramount value of which will be found to justify the vast expenditure of means employed in its production. In this view of the case, every miracle recorded in the Old Testament is only an evidence the more to the sanctity of the covenant of the Gospel; and if so, let every well-wisher to that covenant be careful how, in the vain hope of conciliating those who are not to be conciliated, he adopts a course of argument, the direct and obvious tendency of which, indeed, is to attach suspicion to only one portion of the sacred writings, but which, if established, would necessarily lower our estimate of them as a whole.

> "Ne Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
> Inciderit,"

is a rule of far more momentous application than that of mere literary criticism. None but the wildest fanatic will be disposed to believe hastily in every alleged deviation from the established laws of nature; but that man, on the other hand, must have imbibed little of sound philosophy who, looking round upon all the mysteries by which we are environed, would pronounce such deviations to be impossible; or, taking into consideration the concurrent testimony of past ages, to be, under befitting circumstances, improbable. Surely the legitimate and most probable conclusion, in the face of such evidence as that adduced in support of the scriptural miracles, is not, that the facts are themselves untrue, but that the motives for their occurrence were urgent in exact proportion to what may be presumed of the general unwillingness of the Creator to disturb those laws which, in his wisdom, he has thought fit to impose upon his creation.

CHAPTER XII.

Of the internal Evidence of the Authenticity of the Books of Moses, and of the other Jewish Scriptures.

Bishop Watson has recorded an observation, made by Sir Isaac Newton to Dr. Smith, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, "that he found more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatever." To those who have been in the habit of considering the books of the Holy Scriptures as a mere tissue of astounding incidents, substantiated only by a moderate weight of external evidence, this assertion will appear in the highest degree paradoxical. And yet it is one which every person will feel the more disposed to admit, the more he examines and estimates the detail of those writings by that intuitive apprehension, by which we all judge instinctively of the truth or falsehood of any series of facts which we hear related. Every one knows how difficult it is to maintain such an entire consistency through all the minor points of a fictitious narrative, that no subsequent criticism should be able to detect any incompatibility of fact, or confusion and contradiction in the delineation of character. This difficulty, which increases in a compound proportion, according to the length of the work in the hands of a single author, may and will amount to an actual impossibility in the case of a variety of authors, each separately contributing his share toward the construction of one entire and consistent narrative, especially where the facts to be related lie out of the ordinary course of events. Where, then, as in the instance of the historical books of the Old Testament, we find a long succession of writers, living some of them at remote intervals from one another, each having their

separate and distinct objects in the composition of their respective works, and yet producing, without any seeming intentional combination, a series of compositions, which, when joined together, form one continuous and consistent whole; in which no violation of unity, in the delineation of natural manners, or of individual character, no contradictions of chronology, no anomaly of cause and effect, from first to last, can be detected; where the latter works necessarily presuppose the existence of the earlier, and the earlier would be incomplete unless succeeded by the latter; whilst all alike anticipate the developement of some future system, which has followed in the due course of events, as the final completion of the whole; and where statements, which at first sight appear in the light of contradictions, are discovered, upon a second examination, to be real congruities; in such a case, be the subject matter as marvellous as it may, we have as strong internal evidence of the authenticity and accuracy of those writings, as the nature of things can possibly supply. It is not saying too much to assert, that all these combinations of evidence unite in vouching for the truth of the portions of Scripture now alluded to. Admitting, as we necessarily must do, that the history of the Jews, as contained in the sacred writings, describes a certain part of the human race as placed under very remarkable, and in a certain sense of the term improbable, circumstances; still, that point once conceded by us, all that follows in the filling up, as it may be called, of the main design, is effected with a singular air of truth and reality, which it would be absolutely impossible to account for on the supposition of the main narrative being fictitious. It is evident, as has already been observed, that it is no solution of the difficulty to suppose that the ground work of fact is correct, but that the miraculous incidents are a superaddition produced by fraud, superstition, or national vanity; because by far the greater portion of the prodigies

related are such as must be entirely true or entirely false. We cannot account for them by supposing them to have been natural incidents, elevated into preternatural subjects of wonder by the exaggerations of ignorance. The whole recorded series of events requires, for the sake of their own consistency, that the miracles should have been really such. Otherwise the history itself becomes a tissue of inconsequential improbabilities. Unless, then, it can be shown to be too incredible for the satisfaction of a rational mind, to suppose that, all the strange circumstances and anomalies of our nature considered, Providence should ever condescend to afford a revelation of its will to serve us as a guide through this life, and to direct our hopes towards one in reserve;—unless it can be shown that, even admitting the probability of the communication of *some* revelation, that revelation is not Christianity;—and again, unless, supposing Christianity to be true, we still think it impossible that an intermediate and provisional arrangement should be vouchsafed to some one select portion of mankind, for the express purpose of keeping alive the remnant of true Theism from the abominations of idolatry;—unless, we repeat, all these assumptions are manifestly such as no well-informed mind could possibly admit, under any degree whatever of positive evidence; it seems to follow that, in a choice of conflicting difficulties, those attending a belief in the Divine inspiration and consequent truth of the historical parts of the Old Testament are far less than those which necessarily accompany their rejection.

Once, however, proceed thus far, and the course of the believer lies smooth during the remainder of his progress. The intervention of the Deity once admitted as probable, the inference is obvious, that the same superintending care would continue to interpose till the final accomplishment of its object should be achieved: and thus the miracles of the New Testament would, by a direct implication, afford

confirmatory testimony to those of the Old, and the miracles of the Old Testament to those of the New. On the other side, the cause of infidelity is encumbered with accumulating difficulties at every step. Get rid of the preternatural occurrences recorded by Moses, as the mistakes of a barbarous and superstitious age, still we are met by those connected with the later portions of the Jewish history. Deny those, and, in addition to the improbability that an ancient and remarkable people should ever have existed, the whole of whose presumed historical records should essentially prove to have been a fiction; we have again all the miraculous occurrences connected with the first establishment and subsequent propagation of Christianity, to account for by the same theory of ignorance or forgery. And, after all, if we ask ourselves, what is the great point to be gained, by thus questioning the records of past ages, step by step, and by attempting, at this late period, to prove to be false, what the assertions of professed eye-witnesses declare to have been true; the end and object of this obstinacy of scepticism is nothing less than the dissolution of all the highest sanctions of morality, and the extinction of the hopes of a future life. Surely so unworthy a conclusion, in want of other evidence, would itself argue an unsoundness in the premises upon which it is founded.

The argument, then, in favour of the authenticity of the Jewish sacred history, derived from the internal air of probability which pervades the whole, is one to which it is impossible to do justice, otherwise than by referring each respective reader to the original work, and recommending him to judge for himself by the standard of his own intuitive common sense. It may not, however, be amiss to point out some few instances, selected at random, in illustration of this view of the subject.

The theoretical perfection of the Jewish moral code, and the singular contrast which it presents with

the rebellious and wayward disposition of the people for whose use it was promulgated, has already been alluded to. It has also been observed, on the same occasion, that this opposition between the illumination of the legislator and the darkness of the governed is precisely that which we might expect to find in the case of the communication of a Divine law to a barbarous people. But upon the supposition that the writings attributed to Moses are the exaggerated statements of that remarkable person himself, or the forgeries of a subsequent period, the fact now referred to would be completely inexplicable. Upon the former hypothesis, we must suppose that Moses, in order to give an imposing air to the law, of which he was the promulgator, was the inventor of that tissue of asserted miracles, which his writings declare to have accompanied the Israelites in their progress from Egyptian captivity to the promised land of Canaan. But it is obviously inconceivable that the same person who, by a wilful false statement, would attempt to give to a law of his own invention the sanction of Divine authority, by an audacious assertion of miracles which had never really taken place, should at the same time act so inconsequentially as to represent that same law in that same narrative as failing of its proposed salutary effect, through the folly and obstinacy of those for whose improvement it was intended. No impostor wilfully invents a falsehood for the sake of proving the failure of his own favourite theories; yet if the miracles recorded in the books of Moses were false, and still those writings were really his, with this gratuitous folly he was undoubtedly chargeable. If, on the other hand, we suppose what are called the Mosaic books to be the production of a later period, the difficulty now stated is rather increased than diminished. In the first place, it must be pronounced to be next to an impossibility to palm upon a whole nation, however barbarous, a written code of precise and often vexatious enactments, com-

bined with the most exquisite moral beauty, as a real work of antiquity, which, supposing the story related of it to be true, would necessarily have been in practical operation before such a forgery could be produced; and, secondly, this theory would still suppose in the forger precisely the same act of folly which it seems impossible to attribute, with the slightest probability, to any acknowledged human motives. If those books were the coinage of a later age, and intended to give celebrity to the name of Moses, on the same principle which has led many superstitious people to invent false legends for the sake of conferring honour upon departed saints and legislators; why did not the inventor make his panegyric more valuable, by stating the success of the laws in question, in ameliorating the morals of the Israelites, to have been in all respects complete? How could the same mind conceive the idea of the tremendous thunders and lightnings and earthquakes of Mount Sinai, and of the petulant murmurings and rebellions of the Jews against a law thus awfully enforced? If it be urged that such anomalous conduct accords exactly with what we know of the strange contradictions of human nature, we readily agree in the truth of that observation; but we reply, that, though perfectly in keeping with reference to the practical follies of the human breast, such a delineation is by no means consistent with what an interested person would be disposed to invent, whilst attempting to impose a false and plausible statement upon others. A fabulous writer represents his Orpheus, or whoever may be the fictitious hero of his narrative, reducing men and brutes from the savage to a civilized state by the mere charm of his eloquence: he, on the contrary, whose lot it is to relate the real history of the practical effects of the most truly Divine philosophy upon the stubborn materials of our fallen nature, will have a far less pleasing, and as it may at first sight appear, a far less plausible story to record.

It may be safely asserted that none of us know, or possibly could anticipate from conjecture, the entire degree of desperate resistance presented by the evil principle to the good, in the history of the human heart. We cannot conceive that the miracles, recorded to have taken place in the wilderness, were compatible with the systematic spirit of disobedience related of the followers of Moses. True; we cannot conceive it, *à priori*, and, therefore, it is to the highest degree improbable that such a narrative should be forged for the purpose of imposing upon mankind. But neither can we conceive that the most awful visitations of Providence should oftener have a tendency to harden than to soften the feelings of irreligious and profligate persons. We should never dare to anticipate as a theory, what, unfortunately, we know to be experimentally true, that the hardihood of human wickedness is seldom more dreadfully displayed than in the sinking of a crowded ship, at the execution of a criminal, or during the ravages of pestilence in a thickly peopled city.* There is a desperation of

* The tendency of temporal affliction in a mind thoroughly imbued with the principles of Christianity is undoubtedly to invigorate the feeling of devotion, and to make the sufferer cling with more eager reliance to the protection of Heaven. But examples of this description constitute the exception, not the rule, when applied to human nature in general. The following is the description afforded by an eye-witness of the effect produced upon the minds of the population of London by the plague, in the year 1665. It unhappily accords too exactly with what we read of other large communities which have been visited with the like scourge:—

"The people themselves did not see the hand of God, nor seek righteousness, when God's hand was so dreadfully lifted up against us. In one house you might hear them roaring under the pangs of death; in the next tippling, ... and belching out blasphemies against God; one house shut up with a *red cross* and *Lord have mercy upon us!* the next open to all uncleanness and impiety, being senseless of the anger of God. In the very pest-houses such wickednesses committed as are not to be named. . . . . The hottest judgments did not teach many of us either to pray or repent."—*Life of General Monck, by T. Gumble, D.D.*

Bourienne, in his memoirs of Napoleon, gives a no less striking delineation of that atrocity of feeling which almost invariably accompanies the extremity of human misery, where the counteraction of religion is wanting. The narrative refers to the disastrous retreat of the French army from Syria after their discomfiture before the walls of Acre.

"A most intolerable thirst, the total want of water, and excessive heat.

principle in the thoroughly vicious, which hardens itself in exact proportion to the appeal which would soothe its obduracy into gentleness; and though the average moral character of mankind may not deserve the full severity of this description, still we know that the waywardness of human nature at the moment of trial is far beyond what we conceive of our feelings in their common and quiescent state. The incredulity of the later Jews, who had been eye-witnesses of our Saviour's miracles, has often been mentioned with surprise, and by the impugners of revelation has been referred to as an obvious improbability. Yet this very character was given of them by our Redeemer himself. "If they hear not Moses

and a fatiguing march over burning sandhills, quite disheartened the men, and made every generous sentiment give way to feelings of the grossest selfishness, and most shocking indifference. I saw officers with their limbs amputated, thrown off the litters, whose removal in that way had been ordered, and who had themselves given money to recompense the bearers. I saw the amputated, the wounded, the infected, or those only suspected of infection, deserted and left to themselves. The march was illumined by torches, lighted for the purpose of setting fire to the little towns, villages, and hamlets which lay in their route, and the rich crops with which the land was then covered. The whole country was in a blaze. Those who were ordered to preside at this work of destruction *seemed eager to spread desolation on every side, as if they could thereby avenge themselves for their reverses, and find in such dreadful havoc an alleviation of their sufferings.* We were constantly surrounded by plunderers, incendiaries, and the dying, who, stretched on the sides of the road, implored assistance in a feeble voice, saying, 'I am not infected, I am only wounded;' and to convince those whom they addressed, they re-opened their old wounds, or inflicted on themselves fresh ones. Still nobody attended to them. 'It is all over with him,' was the observation applied to the unfortunate beings in succession, while every one pressed onward. *The sun which shone in an unclouded sky in all its brightness was often darkened by our conflagrations. On our right lay the sea, on our left and behind us the desert made by ourselves, before were the privations and sufferings which awaited us."—Memoirs of Napoleon, by Bourienne. English translation. Chapter XX.*

Surely if such is human nature in its unregenerate state, the religion which teaches how these fearful and malignant passions may be subdued into love of God and universal charity towards man ought to be a subject of any feeling rather than that of contempt and aversion. It was a striking observation of a French poet, in illustration of the extreme wickedness of the human heart, "that at the very commencement of the world, when as yet society consisted of only four or five persons, one member of that small community was the murderer of his brother."

and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." This very experiment was, we are assured, on two remarkable occasions, made upon that stubborn people, and in both cases the result was precisely what had been anticipated. Lazarus, the friend of our Redeemer, was publicly raised from the dead; and the effect produced was, that the Jewish rulers became alarmed, in consequence of the increased number of converts to the new faith, for the stability of their ancient institutions. The resolution, accordingly, to which they came, was entirely in unison with the spirit of this world. "The chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death, because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus." That same Jesus was himself miraculously raised up from the grave, and the truth of his doctrines confirmed by a communication of preternatural gifts to his followers; and again the conduct of the same rulers was consistent with itself. They admitted, because it was impossible to deny, that "indeed a notable miracle had been done," but so far from becoming converts to a religion which they feared would supersede their own, on the contrary, "when they had called the Apostles and *beaten* them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." It cannot be denied that there is a strong resemblance between the obstinacy, for it can scarcely be called disbelief, of the later Jews, notwithstanding the notoriety of our Saviour's miracles, and that of their forefathers, who so repeatedly witnessed those of Moses; and we know also from experience, that it is a resemblance resulting from the principles of our common nature, which is ever consistent even in its most anomalous inconsistencies. And it is by this strong resemblance that we are satisfied of the truth and justice of the drawing in both instances. But if from these general and broad principles we proceed, in the case of the early Jews, to a more minute

and detailed examination of what is related of them by their historian, the accuracy of the delineation becomes more striking from the extreme air of probability with which he relates the oscillations of feeling in that wayward people, according as they chanced to be operated upon at the moment, by supernatural or familiar objects. The rebellious spirit of the Israelites was evidently not that which would be the result of scepticism, with regard to the real nature of the miracles which they had witnessed. On the contrary, it was that alternation of opposite and contradictory modes of excitement which is so often to be found in an ill-regulated mind, which wants steadiness of principle rather than reality of conviction, and which relapses into sin from weakness and coarseness of character, not from any disbelief in the Divine sanctions of religion. Nothing, in fact, can be more graphically or strikingly drawn than the whole description of the migration of the Israelites as given by their inspired historian. The little apprehension which they appear at first to have entertained of the nature of the mission of their leader; the reckless hurry with which they rushed from the territory of their oppressors to the confines of the Red Sea; the deep depression which they displayed upon finding their retreat apparently cut off; the extravagance of their joy upon their miraculous deliverance, followed almost immediately by an impatience of the privations of the desert, and a longing after the degrading comforts of their recent state of slavery; their awe-stricken apprehensions during the thunderings from Mount Sinai, followed, after an extremely short interval, by an act of the grossest idolatry; their discontents, their jealousies, and heart-burnings against Moses and their other rulers; their exaggerated alarm respecting the physical powers and prowess of the Canaanites, and their conspiracy to abandon their leaders, and to return into Egyptian captivity; all these are traits of character in which

we recognise the fickleness of human nature at every step, such as the governors of every large assemblage of people have bitterly experienced; and such as the reports of travellers, whose wanderings have more especially thrown them in the way of uncivilized nations, describe to us at the present moment.

But it is one thing to recognise the characteristic workings of our nature, when we find them faithfully portrayed for us in any well-written record, and another to anticipate, by the intuitive strength of our own imagination, what those workings, under any given modification of circumstances, would be. There is a boldness and an individuality in the sketches of real life which it is scarcely possible to invent, and of which, accordingly, a happy and tolerably successful imitation has ever been considered among the foremost proofs of literary talent. Now the question is, whether, putting the preternatural incidents of the Jewish history out of the question, the detailed narrative does, or does not, contain strong internal evidence of its own authenticity. This is a query as to a point of fact, of which every reasonable person is a competent judge, and which we cannot but think would invariably be answered in the affirmative. Perhaps we should correctly describe it in stating it to be a surprisingly probable portraiture of human nature, placed in an improbable position as to external circumstances. The rebellions and cowardice attributed to the Israelites, whilst under the guidance of Moses, never, we repeat, appears to have been the consequence of any disbelief of the miracles already performed for their deliverence. On the contrary, their conduct seems to have been precisely what might have been expected from untrained minds; held, indeed, together by the terror and conviction resulting from occasional displays of superhuman power in their conductors, but still sinking under the depression and wear of animal spirits from the privations under

which they were suffering, and the difficulty of calculating upon miraculous assistance in future emergencies, where all the physical powers of nature seemed arrayed against them. It is easy for those who have not been thus tried to say, that the experience of past miracles ought to have given them a full unshrinking confidence in the certainty of similar support for the future. So in strict reason it ought. But the question is, not what is reasonable, or what appears to us, after the whole train of circumstances has become matter of history, the most natural line of conduct, but what would be the operation of human passions, under the natural impatience produced by immediate hardship in a new and perfectly unexampled position, when the scorching desert lay before and behind them, and the confidence inspired by the recollection of former deliverances was met and counteracted by the scene of unvaried desolation which met their eyes. "Can God," they said, "furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed: can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?" What human being can look into his own heart, and not feel that the despondency which we charge as so heavy a sin upon the rude and thoughtless Israelites would not, under similar circumstances, have been his own? Scripture itself, we should recollect, whilst it records the weaknesses and caprices of this singular people, charges their failings to no permanent doubt of the reality of the Divine mission of Moses and of Joshua; but to those fluctuations of feeling under the operation of momentary trials, which not less really and substantially, though less palpably, afforded the explanation of all the inconsistencies of human conduct among individuals a thousand times better trained, and more advanced in moral discipline, than the persons here described. "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua,

and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord that He had done for Israel."*

CHAPTER XIII.

Of the internal Evidence of the Authenticity of the Historical Books of the Old Testament subsequent to Moses.

THE final extinction of that generation which had witnessed the miracles attendant upon the first introduction of the Israelites into Canaan was followed, as the general habits and disposition of that people would lead us to anticipate, by an increased apostasy from the religion of Jehovah, and an adoption of the idolatries of the neighbouring nations. From this period to the point where the narrative of the books of the Old Testament terminates, the recorded course of events is precisely what might have been expected from human nature placed in the very peculiar circumstances there described, but in those circumstances only. The rule of probability, as applicable to this remarkable portion of history, must have reference to a condition of society which, at this moment, it is scarcely possible for us adequately to conceive. A small and by no means highly civilized nation, miraculously supported in its political existence by the occasional intervention of the Almighty himself, to the almost total exclusion of the common and regular modes of defence against hostile incursion, and subjected to institutions not the natural growth of the popular habits and character, but forcibly imposed upon them by a fatality stronger than themselves, presents a picture so perfectly unlike any thing which we are prepared to meet with in the history of mankind, that we look with a natural curiosity for

* Joshua xxiv. 31.

the recorded details of transactions so extraordinary. The result is still, as on the former occasion, humiliating to the human character from the scene of moral degradation, mingled, indeed, with occasional beautiful and sublime touches, which it presents; and though still remarkable for the air of reality with which the successive incidents are related, is obviously such as few impostors could, and none actuated by any known motive of national variety or self-interest would, wish to invent. The signal successes which, from time to time, attended their military expeditions, were so completely independent of the usual natural means for their successful accomplishment, that nothing short of occasional recurrences of the most implicit faith in the Divine promises, and in the continuance of that support which had never deserted their forefathers in the hour of need, could have enabled them to calculate upon similar interpositions, in those impending perils which so repeatedly threatened them with extinction. And, accordingly, we find in the history of that period a succession of alternations between moments of extreme depression and of sanguine confidence, whilst, at the same time, the moral and religious character of the people was, from the same causes, fluctuating between an inveterate hostility to the idolatrous practices of their Canaanitish neighbours, and an occasional adoption of their worst abominations. Such, in fact, was, more or less, the national character down to the time of the Chaldean captivity. That under any view of the case, it was one by no means calculated to add to the credit of the people thus portrayed, is perfectly clear. Our present business, however, is not with the question, how far the Israelites appear to have acted worthily of the high position in which God's selection of them as the depositaries of his will had placed them, but how far the narrative which records these transactions comes to us with the stamp and impress of authenticity. Now, as the existence of that history as a work, at all events

of very high antiquity, must be admitted by all parties, the only query is, "*who were the historians?*" were they friends, or were they enemies, who have recorded the circumstances in question? Either supposition, if by adopting it we mean to imply a bias in the mind of the writer to exaggerate or to detract from the merits of the people described, is equally inadmissible. The Jewish history is, clearly, not the work of enemies to their name, for they are ever spoken of as the only observers of the true religion, and as the chosen nation of the one true God. It can scarcely, on the other hand, be said to be the production of friends, for its far greater proportion is little more than a narrative of the waywardness, ingratitude, and profligacy of that self-same people. Again, it was not the composition of any political party, advocating one set of state maxims, to the exclusion of others, for it is equally lavish of its censures upon democracy and monarchy, whilst it records the transactions of both. It is not the calculating panegyrist upon this or that individual, for, with the exception of the few truly righteous persons who were thinly scattered over that long period, in relating the achievements of the most eminent and laudable of their monarchs, it dwells with, at least, an equal detail and minuteness upon their failings and crimes, as upon their virtues. It condemns the reprobate Saul, and yet it mourns over his fallen fortunes with striking pathos: it eulogizes the sanguine, open-hearted, and devout David, and yet it denounces in the strongest language of censure, his ingratitude, blood-guiltiness, and adultery. It recites, with beautiful accuracy, the most eloquent devotional composition on record, Solomon's dedication of the temple; and expatiates, with delight, upon his many accomplishments, and that various wisdom, the fame of which attracted to his court the queen of the south; and yet it concludes by narrating his total and inexcusable idolatry. It brands with the taint of rebellion and heresy, the long succession of Israelitish

kings, and yet, on the other hand, where censure appears to be called for by the conduct of the more orthodox lineage of David, it applies that censure without stint, and without any attempt at palliation.

It, surely, may be confidently asserted of any history, to which it seems quite impossible to attach the charge of partiality, or of self-interest, in any shape, that its real end and object must have been truth. And such is, undoubtedly, the main impression which the history of the Jewish people, as given in the Old Testament, conveys to our minds. From first to last there is nothing in the whole getting up of the narrative which marks selection, or the grouping and contrasting characters for the sake of effect, for suggesting a political inference, or eliciting some favourite prudential maxim. Its resemblance to real nature is that of the faithful reflection of the mirror, and not of the calculated arrangement of the imaginative painter. Nor is this all. The portraiture given to us is not only that of a far from perfect people, but also the failings which we find successively attributed to them are precisely such as assort with the respective periods described. Every event, every trait of character, is in the strictest keeping with the existing course of events. The sins of the earlier epochs in the career of nations, like those in the history of individuals, are generally such as result from unsteady principles and desultory passions acting in defiance of better knowledge; whilst the latter stage, in both cases, is disfigured by an increasing spirit of worldliness, and the callousness of mind which so frequently comes on when the season of novelty and excitement is gone by. This gradual process of decay, which constitutes the summary of the history of almost all the extinct nations of antiquity, is, in a striking manner, that of the fortunes of the Jewish people. From the time of the revolt of the ten tribes, to that of the captivity, the worst and most fatal symptom of approaching dissolution which can show itself in the

body politic, namely, an increasing indifference to the institutions which warmed the heart-blood of their forefathers, became, from year to year, more manifest. Though professedly subsisting upon a principle of miraculous interference, their invocations of the Divine protection seem gradually to have become less and less earnest, and their reliance upon human means of support, in spite of the strong remonstrances of the law and of the later prophets upon those points, more uniform.* When we say that such conduct was, at least, natural, and that, in proportion as such prodigies as those which accompanied their first growth became less frequent, their zeal might be expected to decline from its original fervency, we are, in fact, only adding the sanction of our judgment, as to the internal probability of the narrative which asserts it of them. The second book of Kings and the second book of Chronicles bear every mark of their own authenticity, from the striking delineation which they afford of a nation, whose patriotism and religion were on the wane, from the mere ordinary tendency to degeneracy which is the fate of all human institutions. In the history of the later kings of Judah we read of occasional attempts made by the sovereigns of the day to revive the dormant spirit of the religion of Moses, by removing the pollutions of

* The book of Malachi, the valedictory remonstrance of the departing spirit of Jewish prophecy, consists of little more than an eloquent and indignant delineation of the extreme selfishness and worldliness of feeling which at that late period, had succeeded in quenching all the higher principles of devotion in the Israelitish nation. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master. If, then, I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of Hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar, and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor: will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts. . . . . Who is there, even among you, that would shut the doors for naught? Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for naught. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of Hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." *Malachi* i. 6. &c.

the temple, and reestablishing the sacrifices according to the form prescribed by that legislator. But these very attempts obviously mark the almost complete disuse into which that religion had fallen. They were not the mere correction of such abuses as, in the course of time, might be supposed to have crept in through the occasional ignorance or superstition of the worshippers, but they were, in fact, the reconstruction of ancient usages, which had, for a long course of time, been completely lost sight of. It is evident that the prevailing principles of the day were those of total irreligion; and though the influence of a few well-disposed monarchs might succeed, for a moment, in giving an external and transitory animation to the extinct spirit of true devotion, there was no corresponding feeling on the part of the people. We read of Hezekiah, that he celebrated a passover far exceeding, in the solemnity of the ceremonies, and in the assemblage of the worshippers, any which had been known since the days of Solomon: but we do not find the slightest proofs that the devotional excitement, thus created, was attended with any permanent or substantial effect. On the contrary, we read of his son Manasseh, that he polluted himself with the grossest idolatry; and what is still more remarkable, only two reigns later, from the surprise and consternation which a discovery of a copy of the original law created in king Josiah, and Hilkiah the high-priest, by reference to which they learned how widely they had deviated from the religion of their ancestors, we find that that complex system of sacred legislation had, for the space of one generation at least, been preserved only in the form of general oral tradition. In this last-mentioned circumstance we cannot but remark the striking analogy which existed between the neglect of the written law of Moses, which prevailed in the latter period of the Jewish history previous to the captivity, and the disregard of the Holy Scriptures in general, which so strongly characterized

that languid and worn-out state of the Church of Rome, which immediately preceded the establishment of Protestantism. It was not, as we are informed, until the second year after his entry into the monastery of Erfurt, that Luther accidentally met with a Latin Bible, and commenced that study of original revelation which shortly afterwards produced such important effects upon mankind: so like is human nature in all ages to itself. In such a state of moral lethargy as that which prevailed among the Jews at the period now described, it was, clearly, not within the power of the sovereign, however well disposed, to stimulate his subjects into a substantial reformation. He seems, indeed, to have done all that which the best principles could suggest; "He sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small. And he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul; to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book; and he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the Lord their God. And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabit-

ants of Jerusalem." But the effort thus made was only like the last convulsive struggle which precedes dissolution in an exhausted frame. The next generation saw the extinction of the kingdom of Judah, and the commencement of that series of tremendous inflictions, which from that day to the present, with the exception of a few more prosperous intervals, have marked the fortunes of that singular and devoted people.

CHAPTER XIV.

The same subject continued.

THUS, then, there is from first to last a consistency in the chain of events recorded in the Jewish Scriptures, which would seem to be perfectly inexplicable upon any other principle than that of their entire genuineness and authenticity. The later writings, whether we look to them for information on questions of natural polity, religious belief, or the ever varying shades of manners and habitual impressions, all pre-suppose the existence of the earlier; and the earlier, as obviously stamped with a prospective character, were incomplete without the addition of the latter. But as no hypothesis with which we are acquainted will allow us to assign the date of their respective compositions to one and the same period, of course the theory that they were forged for a specific purpose of imposition falls at once to the ground. That from the miraculous incidents which they relate they are unlike all other authentic historical documents, is readily granted; but it by no means follows that the peculiarity of character which attaches to them argues any real improbability in the facts themselves. The abstract question of probable or *improbable*, on those points, must rest entirely

upon the degree of our assent to the primary propositions with which we commenced this discussion. If we deem an express revelation of the Divine Will, in some form or other, as not inconsistent with the arrangements of Providence; if we admit, also, that of all presumed revelations, Christianity is the one preeminently borne out by a vast weight of external and internal evidence; and if we grant, also, that from the late period at which the acknowledged circumstances of human nature required that the Christian dispensation should be communicated to mankind, a previous provisional and less perfect system of discipline might reasonably be looked for,—surely, with these warrantable admissions, the preternatural character of the fortunes connected with the Israelitish family present no very formidable objection to the really candid mind. It may sound paradoxical to assert that the probability of the truth of that remarkable portion of human history would be actually diminished, were it found to be more analogous than it actually is with that of other nations. Considered, however, as an abstract proposition, unconnected with that habitual bias and predisposition forced upon us by our own individual experience, such undoubtedly would appear to be the legitimate assumption. Certainly, if we are reduced to the alternative of either discarding the momentous and cheering hopes held forth by the Gospel, with its accompanying practical rule of life, or, on the other hand, of admitting the fact that a visible Providence did, from the world's beginning, prepare the way for that sublime dispensation, and only ceased finally to interfere when such interposition was no longer needed, the latter supposition, independently of the vast preponderance of external testimony by which it is guaranteed, is a thousand times the most intrinsically probable. With this view of the question, then, we may surely be *content*, without seeking to shelter ourselves in that *intermediate* and most unphilosophical scheme which,

admitting Christianity to be a gift from heaven, would flinch from the supposition that the preparatory arrangements for the communication of that gift could possibly proceed from other than natural causes. If we would preserve our consistency of argument, we must either deny *in toto* the possibility of any miraculous intervention whatever in the case of the latter no less than of the former covenant; or, if we find ourselves obliged, by the irresistible force of evidence, to pass that line, we must be content to admit the reality of such special acts of Providence, not in such proportion only as our caprice or prejudices may dictate, but as the only authentic writings extant which have reference to the case appear broadly and manifestly to assert. At the same time it is but reasonable to observe, that the first impression conveyed to our minds by the perusal of the inspired historians is, perhaps, that of a state of things less analogous to the ordinary course of human events than was actually the case with regard to the transactions related. The miraculous events related in the Bible, in consequence of the condensation of the narrative, often occupy a much nearer position, with reference to one another, in the associations of our minds, than would accord with the respective periods of their occurrence. A few pages of the sacred history are, we should recollect, sometimes the register of the events of several centuries. Miracles, even at the period of their greatest frequency, must ever have been thinly scattered among the habitual incidents of human life. Most probably, by far the greater portion of the express deviations from the established laws of nature, permitted by Providence since the creation of man, are enumerated in the Bible. These, if spread over the long course of time which the sacred narrative comprehends, will be found to bear a very trifling proportion to the whole. It is obvious, accordingly, that the most favoured of God's saints must ever have had more to do with the cal-

culation of common contingences, and the making provision for the supply of human want by human means, than our habitual impressions, derived from our study of the sacred writings, would suggest. The Elijah of the Old, and the Paul of the New Testament, may be quoted as cases in point with reference to this remark. Both these memorable personages, if there is any truth in Holy Writ, had their respective Divine communications and their miraculous powers. Yet both had, also, their long visitations of alarm, of difficulty, of penury, and of danger. The occasional helps afforded them seem to have been intended almost for the sole purpose of substantiating their title to the character of God's chosen messengers, and only incidentally for the protection of the body, and the furtherance of their personal comfort. This observation has already been adduced, in order to account for what many persons have considered the remarkable phenomena of the very unsteady faith produced in the minds of the persons who were eye-witnesses of the miracles recorded in the sacred writings. Even under the most extreme circumstances, the natural incidents produced by the established course of events must numerically have far exceeded the special deviations here alluded to. But as our calculations for the future, by an admitted law of our nature, are entirely regulated by our experience of the past, it is evident that the main impression left upon the minds, even of the most openly favoured of God's servants, must ever have been the anticipation of natural, rather than of preternatural, occurrences in the yet unrevealed events of futurity. Fictitious narratives of wonder, whether intended for the purposes of amusement or imposture, whether in the shape of the wild dreams of romance, or of the legends of Romish hagiology, are ever prodigal of their attempts to astonish us by the prodigies which they relate. Scripture, on the contrary, never loses sight of the analogy of common nature and of truth;

but, with that harmony and simplicity of character which pervades the material universe, ever produces its great transcendental ends by the least possible expenditure of means.

CHAPTER XV.

Further observations upon the moral tendency of the Levitical Institutions.

THE presumed argument against the Divine authority of the Old Testament, derived from the very low degree of moral merit manifested by the Jews throughout their whole history, has been already alluded to in some detail; but it may not, perhaps, be improper to revert to it, in this place, for the sake of a few more observations which the subject will admit. The great force of this objection is, as it would seem, broken down at once, if we grant that, presuming that God prefers accomplishing his ends through the intervention of secondary, and, so far as is possible, what are usually deemed natural causes, the selection of at least one nation, as the depositaries of his will, prior to the final communication of the Christian system, was rendered absolutely necessary by that tendency to idolatry which forms so striking a characteristic of human nature in its undisciplined state. Why man was so created, as to be liable to such aberrations, it is not for us to discuss. The certainty of the fact is quite sufficient for the present argument. Had the Mosaic law never existed, in other words, had the Jewish nation never been thus especially favoured, what, as has been already asked, can we imagine would have been the reception afforded to the preaching of Christ and of his apostles, in the four thousandth year of the world? It is not *too much to* say, that the whole moral feel-

ing of mankind would have undergone a complete wreck long before that time. The degrading effects of barbarism, and the scarcely less pernicious consequences of false philosophy and selfish casuistry, would have succeeded in entirely obliterating all that pure sensitiveness of principle on which all the internal evidences and all the practical value of religion depend. This foremost, and otherwise inevitable, evil, was undoubtedly obviated, in a great measure, by the promulgation of the written Mosaic law, and by the special sanctions given through it to the great primary truths of religion and morals, and by the executive enforcement of those sanctions, under a theocratical government, for so many centuries. That the nation, thus selected, fulfilled the task assigned to it, by preserving entire the principles of true religion, is an indisputable fact. With the economy of this arrangement, then, it appears impossible for our reason to quarrel, especially as it appears probable that, with all their defects, the Jews were still as fit instruments for the purposes of Providence, and as little objectionable, on the score of moral desert, as any other people of that early period in which the selection was made. Our knowledge of the state of society at that epoch is confined to what we can collect from the sacred writings, with, perhaps, a few very uncertain conjectures, derivable from the precarious testimony of early Pagan writers. Europe, if inhabited at all, must at that time have been the residence of a mere horde of savages: the facts recorded of the Egyptians are any thing rather than favourable to them, as a humane and polished people, whilst the inhabitants of Canaan are known to have been polluted by the worst stains which can disfigure human nature. Was, then, the scheme of Providence to be suspended, because the history of mankind was thus dark and uninviting? Because the whole existing human race was vicious, was it therefore to be allowed to continue so, or to sink still deeper in moral

degradation, rather than that the Divine wisdom should avail itself of incidental causes for effecting a cure? This is the real question, which the urgers of the above-mentioned objection are bound to answer, or to abandon their position. The Deist himself admits, that the system of God's government is to make the machinery of human passions conduce to the accomplishment of his wise purposes; but this admission, if true, is not the less so because we may chance to arrive at it through the declarations of an inspired writer, rather than through the conclusions of the moralist and philosopher. The very peculiar position of the Jewish people, with respect to the singular covenant under which they were placed, affords, however, another most important instruction to mankind. In Judaism and Christianity we have two parallel but opposed cases, of equally authentic Divine revelation, professedly established upon dissimilar, though, with reference to their respective objects, equally consistent, views of God's moral government. The law of Moses displays to our contemplation a perfectly just but strictly retributive Governor of the universe: that of Christ, a reconciled judge, not less intrinsically just, but shielding the rigour of his justice in the attributes of unbounded mercy. In order duly to appreciate the full beauty of the latter dispensation, it is quite necessary that we should previously have accustomed our minds to contemplate the rigorous and inflexible enactments of the former. No stronger appeal can possibly be made to the feelings of a human being, who has recently been rescued from some dreadful impending danger, than that afforded by the retrospect of the very perils from which he has providentially escaped. The mind, at such a moment, takes a natural delight in representing to itself all the horrors with which it had been threatened, and contrasting them with the tranquillity and security of its present position. Such *feelings, in a well-*constructed nature, are invariably

accompanied by a sense of humility, of self-abasement, and of gratitude to that power to which it is indebted for protection. Now, if a Christian would know the very exceeding value of the immense gifts which have been conferred upon him by the covenant of the Gospel, he must, for that purpose, study, in fear and trembling, the books of the Old Testament. He will there find the veil of mystery, which at this moment conceals the really existing agency of Providence upon his creatures, withdrawn, and the whole mechanism of the Divine gonernment of the affairs of this world exposed bare to his view. He will see the necessary connexion, as certain as that of any other regular series of cause and effect, which exist between obedience to God's will and happiness, between disobedience and misery. It is true that he can no longer calculate upon that immediate temporal retribution which formed an essential part of that system of theocracy which constituted the national polity of the Jews, but he will see, with no less certainty of conviction, that the delay of execution argues no forgetfulness in the Almighty mind, nor any unsteadiness of purpose. Though sickened, as he reads, by the details of human folly and wickedness in their worst shapes, he will find the deep abomination of sin denounced with no less fearful energy of language in the Old Testament than in the New, and the great Author of all things spoken of with an awe-stricken solemnity of feeling, far exceeding any thing which ever suggested itself to the most eloquent of Pagan poets or philosophers, in their sublimest moments of fancy. He will learn by what an elaborate process of expiatory sacrifices and purgations our fallen nature was ineffectually attempted to be cleansed for a long succession of ages, before the accomplishment of the one great and sufficient sacrifice in the person of Christ. He will read with what parental anxiety He, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, watches over the smallest

occurrences upon earth; with what searching intuitiveness he looks into the most minute germs of thought in the human breast; with what strict but kind severity he checks man's deviations from rectitude; with what eagerness of affection he hails the first symptoms of contrition and of practical amendment. But the result of the inquiry will be that of amazed self-abasement and humiliation, from the conviction of the utter inability of unredeemed human nature to stand in the presence of Him, in whose sight the very heavens are unclean, and who charges even his angels with folly. Human philosophy, by lowering the standard of religious morality, may have some refuge of hope, in the idea that a moderate, or, as it has been called, a congruous, degree of merit will be all that will be required of us. It may represent the Divine Being as good-natured, if we may presume to use such an expression upon such an occasion, rather than merciful; and indifferent to the distinctions of human conduct, rather than disposed to measure it by the rule of faultless perfection. But the Old Testament affords none of this false and spurious consolation. It asserts, with all the uncompromising severity of truth, the general baseness and selfishness of the human heart; and, though it announces, in no less clear language, the infinite benevolence of the Creator, it supplies no solution of the difficulty, how the exercise of that benevolence may be rendered compatible with the workings of retributive justice, excepting by a few occasional interspersed hints of some intended prospective arrangement, by which, in the fulness of time, this grand anomaly should be explained and reconciled. And in this awful state of uncertainty that earlier portion of the inspired Scriptures leaves us, with our apprehensions awakened, with a conviction of the entire inadequacy of ritual expiations, to accomplish their object, and with faint but indefinite hopes, that the concluding scene in this grand

and momentous drama may prove more satisfactory than the preceding.

Now it is impossible to deny, that without such thrilling conviction of the necessity of some scheme of efficacious redemption, as is forced upon our feelings by the awful system of preparation developed in the Old Testament, and the fearful exposition of the danger attaching to man's natural position, as a moral and responsible agent, we should all of us entertain very inadequate notions of the immense value of that expiation afforded by the covenant of the Gospel. No worldly blessing is duly appreciated by us until its want has been severely felt, and a present enjoyment is then only perceived in its full intensity, when we contrast it with the lot which, under other circumstances, might have been ours. Infinitely beneficent, therefore, as the Christian dispensation is, our Creator has wisely contrived all the avenues and approaches to it, so as to afford the benefit of striking and impressive contrast. He begins as the God of terrors, he concludes as the God of mercy: he makes his covenant a covenant of grace, not of works, in order that no man may boast: he hath concluded all under sin, that he might have mercy upon all.

The place, then, occupied by the Mosaic ritual, in the scheme of revelation, is precisely that which, if Christianity be true, our retrospective review of the whole system would naturally assign to it. As a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, it is most admirably constructed in all its parts. As a code of religious morality it is, so far as it reaches, in all respects worthy of the holy source from which it proceeded. Still, however, it in some measure confessedly is, as indeed from theory it might be expected to be, imperfect in the character of its enactments; for were it otherwise, the subsequent dispensation of the Gospel would have been unnecessary. So far, then, from *wishing* to draw a veil over this partial imperfection, *we may confidently* refer to it as affording one proof

the more of its Divine origin. Let not this observation be deemed paradoxical. No inference, from our daily experience of the measures of Divine Providence, is more certain than that which assures us, that however the Divine wisdom may contrive all things relatively for the best, its system is that of successive gradations, in no one stage of which, except, perhaps, the very highest, our abstract notions of the capability of good are effectively realized. The Levitical institutions, we should recollect, were specially adapted to meet the wants and to promote the practical moral habits of what, with reference to the improved habits of modern times, we must consider a subordinate state of society. Consequently, institutions, which, at the present day, would certainly be superfluous, and, probably, detrimental, may readily be imagined, at that early period, to have been introduced by Divine wisdom into a code, the object of which was to operate beneficially upon the habits of a peculiar people. It is not, therefore, only in its obvious insufficiency as a means of spiritual grace and expiation, that we willingly recognise the imperfection of the Mosaic ritual. Even its social enactments, we readily acknowledge, are, in some cases, stamped with an appearance of rudeness unseemly to our present modes of thinking, and strongly characteristic of an early stage of civil polity, and of comparative incivilization. As some of these points may seem at first sight to trench upon some established maxims of Christian morality, and have consequently been often pointed out by the infidel as inconsistent with the supposition, that institutions thus defective could possibly be the work of a Divine legislator, it may be expedient to examine them, on this occasion, with some degree of detail.

The usage of polygamy, and the liberty of divorce, are among the most prominent of these instances; to which may be added, the sanction given to domestic slavery, and the severe punishments annexed to the

want of chastity in females, and to the disobedience of children toward their parents. The advancers of these objections, however, have, unfortunately for their argument, overlooked the important distinction which exists between the law of Moses and that of Christ, namely, that the former, especially and prominently, is, what the latter certainly is not, a code of civil polity, and of criminal jurisdiction, no less than a system of religious doctrine. In the legislator of the Jews, therefore, was necessarily blended the sternness of the jurist and of the judge, together with the more attractive meekness of the spiritual teacher. This circumstance, of course, imposed upon him the duty of enforcing many painful, though expedient, regulations, from the inconvenience of which, in consequence of its exclusively spiritual character, the covenant of the Gospel escapes.* The Christian student may, accordingly, peruse the whole of the writings of the New Testament with no other feelings than those of love to God and man in their purest and most exalted state; whilst the unattractive enactments of a criminal code, entering, as such works must do, into all the possible details of crime, and imposing upon each their peculiar penalties, are kept out of view, as belonging to the department of the civilian, and not of the divine. The penal ordinances of the Jewish law, on the contrary, intermingled, as they are, with the warmest breathings of humanity

* Some of the civil institutions of Moses strongly remind us of the well-known apologue, in which a dying husbandman is related to have induced his sons to bestow a complete course of manual labour upon the soil of his vineyard, by exciting their hopes of discovering a concealed treasure. Had the Jewish legislator contented himself with merely enjoining cleanly and wholesome habits to his uncivilized countrymen, it is probable that the mandate would have been disregarded, or, at all events, attended to in a slovenly and perfunctory manner. But by consecrating cleanliness by a course of ritual performances, and subjecting the slightest leprous tendency upon their persons, or the stains of mildew on the walls of their dwellings, to a series of religious expiations, the end and purpose of civilization were secured, even before the feelings which accompany a more *advanced stage* of society were developed. We surely cannot deny the *praise of great* secular wisdom to such an arrangement.

and religious purity, contain much which, though often necessary as provisionary regulations, even in the most advanced age of human civilization, must still be, after all, unpleasant subjects of perusal; whilst also, as intended for the instruction and coercion of a semi-barbarous people, they exhibit views of possible crime, which, in our more improved state of manners, can be contemplated only with feelings of repugnance. Common candour, however, and a very little degree of reflection, will serve to show us that the objections raised against the Divine origin of the Mosaic institutions, on this account, are without the slightest foundation of justice. Once admitting the possibility of the Divine Being condescending to legislate, in a secular sense, for any society of human creatures, it appears to follow, as a matter of absolute necessity, that the regulations intended to operate practically upon the habits of the governed must have reference to the existing state of manners and of knowledge: and not only so, but (unless we would assert, that a people thus divinely instructed should also be forced, by a continued miracle, into a precocity of civilization naturally unattainable by any other than a very slow and tedious process,) we must admit, also, that a legislature, even of this high order, must be content to tolerate, for a while, those minor abuses which, humanly speaking, it is impossible immediately to eradicate. Under such circumstances, the true wisdom would appear to be to soften, by the interposition of salutary and sober precautions, the rash impetuosity of rude justice, as usually administered by nations so little advanced in cultivation as that now alluded to; and whilst appearing, perhaps, to connive at usages which the highest reason cannot altogether approve, to set quietly into action better principles, the sure ultimate result of which would be the eradication of the original abuse, by a necessary improvement of the moral habits. This latter is the *precise vindication* of the law of Moses with regard

to his permission of divorce adduced by our blessed Saviour himself. "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so." With regard to the question of polygamy, in like manner we may, perhaps, venture to observe that, although in an advanced state of civilization, such as ours, a usage of this description would completely unhinge society by the jealousies it would introduce into families, the neglect of education it would so frequently entail upon the offspring, the heartlessness and selfishness it would promote in the male sex, and the confusion of relationship, with the minor inconveniences connected with the transmission of property which it would occasion, still, the evils resulting from such permission would certainly be far less prominent among the less domestic habits and the less cultivated modes of life of the earlier ages of the world. Under the last-mentioned circumstances, it would also be attended with something like a compensation for its own mischief, by the incidental benefit which it might sometimes produce. In that low stage of society, where the female sex has not yet attained to its proper influence, and where the practice of slavery, with its general accompaniment of promiscuous concubinage, might be expected to depress that more helpless portion of the human race still lower from that point of respectful attachment to which it is entitled, even polygamy itself might often operate as a corrective of the coarseness of an overbearing master, and might tend to raise to a comparative elevation persons whose lot might otherwise have been one of unmingled abasement. The enactment contained in the 21st chapter of Deuteronomy, and in verses from 10th to 14th, exactly corresponds with this view of the intention of the legislator, with respect to his toleration of the usage in question. Admitting, however, the *truth of* these observations, as resulting from the *acknowledged* depravity of human passions, and the

slow process through which they attain to a higher state of refinement, still we cannot but place in an advantageous contrast with a permission accorded only to the low state of society which it implies, the dignified and beneficent admonition above quoted, of the Founder of faith, by which he asserts, in behalf of the female sex, that equality of consideration to which, upon every principle of reason, humanity, and reciprocity of affection, they are so obviously entitled.

Of the enactments of the Jewish law respecting the treatment of slaves, it may be briefly observed, that all of them are such as, whilst they appear to a certain degree to tolerate a necessary evil, in fact hold out the strongest obstacle to its general prevalence, and mitigate, in a great variety of ways, the cruelty and abuses which are too apt to accompany the possession of this species of authority. The necessary manumission of all slaves of Jewish origin at the return of the year of jubilee, by diminishing their commercial value, must have operated as a strong discouragement to the system of slavery in general; whilst even during the continuance of their servitude, the infliction upon them of even a slight bodily injury by their owners gave them a title to the recovery of their liberty. "If a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish, he shall let him go free for his eye's sake: and if he smite out his man-servant's tooth, or his maid-servant's tooth, he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake."* Even in our own days the existence of such a law as this now quoted, would not probably be amiss in those portions of the globe, which, by an unfortunate combination of causes, are destined to witness a continuance of a system of compulsory servitude, even under the profession of the equalizing and beneficent principles of Christianity. The following regulation, extracted from the book of Deuteronomy, affords another proof that it was from no friendly feeling

* Exodus xxi. 26, 27.

towards the usage of slavery that the toleration of it was acknowledged by the Mosaic institutions. "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee. He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him."*

The trial of female chastity, by the test of the water of jealousy, as prescribed in Numb. v. 11, &c. has been frequently compared to the custom of the ordeal, as practised by our Saxon ancestors, and, of course, the inference aimed at by the impugners of revelation has been, that the former usage, like the latter, is a proof of the ignorance and barbarous superstition of the age which admitted it into its legislative code. The cases, are, however, widely different. The expectation of a continued miraculous interference in our own days, so often as we might, in our arrogance, challenge Heaven for the purpose, would, indeed, denote either the darkest intellectual blindness, or the grossest presumption; but it would be perfectly rational and consistent under the theocracy which constituted the civil polity of the Jews. There could be no arrogance in looking for the special interposition of the Deity in cases where he himself had solemnly promised it; but there might be want of faith, and consequently sin, in abstaining from a usage thus solemnly instituted. It has also been well observed, as an important distinction between the two instances in question, that whereas, according to the usage of the ordeal, a miracle was required for the acquittal of the accused party; under the Levitical rule, on the contrary, a miracle was necessary for the purpose of condemnation. In the former case, the failure of the experiment involved the punishment of the innocent; in the latter it could possibly lead only, at the very worst, to the acquittal *of the* guilty.

* Deut. xxiii. 15.

With regard to the last mentioned of the foregoing objections, namely, the occasionally very severe exertion of parental authority, even to the extent of taking away life, as sanctioned by the law of Moses,* it cannot be better met than by extracting, in this place, the words of Bishop Watson, as given in his celebrated Apology for the Bible. "You think 'that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorizes parents, the father and mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death, for what it is pleased to call stubbornness.'—You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power amongst the Romans, the Gauls, the Persians, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind: that it extended to the taking away the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites, in the time of Moses, exercised this paternal power: it was not a custom adopted by all nations, but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had coalesced into communities, it was, probably, very general. Now Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised amongst the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate.—The father and the mother of the child must agree in bringing the child to judgment, and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death: the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true; and the accusation was to be not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was 'stubborn and rebellious, a glutton, and a drunkard.' Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been a humane restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent."

* Deut. xxi. 18, &c.

CHAPTER XVI.

Of the Evidence afforded to the authenticity of the Levitical Institutions, by the onerous Nature of its Ritual, and the present State of the Jewish People.

THE whole series of the Jewish records, then, if attempted to be accounted for by merely natural causes, presents a tissue of difficulties which it would be quite impossible to explain. The miracles, the history of which constitutes so large a portion of their subject matter, unlike those false prodigies, which usually crowd the annals of dark and superstitious periods, as has been already observed, so far from bearing the appearance of a gratuitous super-addition to common-place event, are absolutely necessary, as fundamental facts, to give consistence and probability to the whole narrative. The difficulty cannot be got over by supposing the documents in question to be a partial, much less an entire, forgery. The former hypothesis does not meet the case, the latter presents an absolute impossibility. It is contrary to all experience, as it would be contrary to all reason, that any considerable and ancient nation should exist, the whole of whose written annals should be false; and yet, in the case of the Jews, to stop short at the partial admission of the authenticity of their recorded transactions, to the exclusion of any preternatural agency in their production, would drive us into the admission of positions not one degree more tenable. The fact of the real occurrence of miracles, however, once granted, there appears no reason why we should attempt to set other limits to their extent than those which the Scriptures expressly assign to them. That this portion of history contains the records of a *nation* very far from advanced in civilization is,

indeed, obvious, from the slightest perusal. But, as has been already remarked, this circumstance only adds to our admiration of the awfully solemn theistical doctrines and the spirit of pure and benevolent humanity which pervades so large a portion of it. The exceptions to this indulgent spirit, where they occur, have, indeed, been admitted to be striking; but these very exceptions, as being directed, almost exclusively, against the abominations of idolatry, which nothing short of absolute extermination could have prevented from rendering the whole of these admirable enactments abortive, are themselves a strong internal evidence of the wisdom in which they were conceived, and of the high source from which they emanate. Admit the Mosaic law really to have been what it professes to be, and we see, at once, the absolute necessity of these seemingly harsh provisions; consider it to be the work of a mere human legislator, and we are at a loss to trace in them any purposes of policy, or any features of consistency. Bishop Warburton is of opinion, that the single fact of the silence of Moses, with regard to a future life of rewards or punishments, is a sufficient proof of his Divine legation. We may restate this argument more palpably and broadly by asserting that no legislator could, with the slightest chance of success, assert the bold theory of a theocracy extending its direct superintending care to the minutest circumstances of domestic life, and promising a special miracle for almost every deviation from the law of strict obedience, were not that assertion borne out by fact. Not only, however, does Moses repeatedly hazard this assertion, but he appeals, again and again, to the positive experience of his people for the proof of the reality of the miracles which he narrates. We cannot meet this argument, and thus get rid of the difficulty, by supposing that the books which bear his name were the production of a later period. Such an hypothesis *has already* been shown to be improbable

in the highest degree; and even if granted, it would create more perplexity than it would remove. The later books of the Old Testament not only pre-suppose the existence of the writings of Moses, such as they have descended to our times, but they also, in their turn, bear witness to other and subsequent miracles, for the truth of which they make their own appeal to the testimony of contemporary witnesses. To suppose these last mentioned compositions, again, to be forgeries, is still rushing deeper and deeper into impossibilities, for the sake of avoiding the one primary admission which explains the whole, namely, the Divine origin of the Christian, and consequently of the Levitical dispensation. It has been well observed, that the annual celebration of stated festivals and solemnities by any people is amongst the surest guarantee which can possibly be given to later times of the authenticity of the received traditions of their early ancestry. Such institutions are, in fact, a periodical reenactment of the most influential events in the history of nations; and from the actual identity of ceremonial which, for the most part, accompanies their repetition, they bring the usages of long extinguished ages more immediately, and more correctly, before the eye than any other human contrivance with which we are acquainted. But the whole political history of the Jews was that of the regular recurrence of religious festivals, all illustrating and confirming each other, but each also having its own respective and peculiar object of commemoration. Many of them also, it should be observed, were of an extremely onerous and costly character, such as no people would willingly adopt, for a long succession of ages, without some strong assignable reason, whilst some of their habitual institutions seemed almost to militate against their very existence as an independent people. Of the former kind was the necessity imposed upon all persons adopting the Mosaic ritual of repairing to Jerusalem annually, at

the season of the great festivals: as instances of the latter, may be mentioned the observance of the sabbatical year, which, from the remission of taxes, stated by Josephus to have been granted to the Jews, on that account, by Alexander, appears, if we are to give credit to that historian, to have been, in some degree, maintained so late as the time of that monarch;* and the almost superstitious observance of the weekly Sabbath, of which Pompey and others, during the several sieges of Jerusalem, are said to have taken such pernicious advantage, for the purpose of urging their attacks.

Now surely, if we find a particular people, week after week, year after year, and period after period, with uniformity and precision, as well as with great personal cost and inconvenience, repeating again and again the same routine of social and religious ceremonies, it would seem as certain as certainty can make it, that some events must really have occurred, in the early history of that nation, which rendered such usages imperative upon their ancestors. No assignable reason can be suggested why the later Jews should be found annually celebrating their Passover, their Pentecost, their feast of Tabernacles, excepting the obvious one, that the recurrence of the stated season, in each successive year, brought with it the recollection of the important events to which

* It must be confessed, that the observance of the sabbatical year seems never to have been very rigidly adhered to by the Jews; probably, because of all the Mosaic institutions it was the one which required the largest degree of faith in the special protection of Providence, and which militated most against the natural principle of covetousness. It should be remembered, however, that the disobedience of the nation on this point was expressly foretold, and a future judgment denounced against them, on that account, by Moses himself; (Leviticus xxvi. 34, 35.) and that this specific reason is assigned (2 Chronicles xxvi. 21.) for the infliction upon them of the Babylonish captivity. The force of the argument contained in the observation to which this note is appended is not, however, affected by this admission. The Jews, at all events, acknowledged their conscientious obligation to the observance of the sabbatical year as a Divine institution, which they certainly would not have done, had they not been convinced, in spite of their own wishes and apparent interests to the contrary, that such *was really its character*.

those institutions respectively referred, and to which they might be continuously traced back. The same course of argument, as demonstrative of the authenticity of the Mosaic narrative, will apply, if possible, with still greater force to the great standing miracle of the present condition of the Jews, as we find them scattered through almost every habitable portion of the globe. Striking effects must have had adequate cause. What, then, was the cause which placed, and retains, that singular people in their present peculiar and unparalleled circumstances? By what theory, if we discard that of a special Divine agency, and of that obstinate tenacity of political life, produced by the exclusive character of their traditional usages, are we to explain a fact so completely at variance with all our experience derived from other quarters? The name and traceable lineage of every other ancient nation, with whose history we are acquainted, and, amongst the rest, of the ten heretical Israelitish tribes themselves, have disappeared from the research of the antiquarian, at no long period after they have ceased to exist as a separate body politic. And yet, of the dynasties and nations which at the present moment advance their claim to the highest antiquity, not one was in political existence at the time of the extinction of the Jews as a constituted people. The Byzantine empire dated its birth nearly three hundred years after that period, and yet it is now nearly four hundred years since it has perished, with its long line of emperors, by the natural process of decay. The most ancient monarchy of Europe, that of France, had its origin more than four hundred years subsequent to the same epoch; and if we look elsewhere to the surrounding states, we find a similar spirit of change giving a new form, at different and successive intervals, to the language, habits, religion, and collective character of every portion of the civilized world. *It is no* answer to this remarkable peculiarity attach*ing to the* Jews to assert that they owe their extra-

ordinary vitality, as a people, to natural causes. Those causes, if they mean any thing, must be their religion and social institutions. But whence did institutions possessing this remarkable property of making the actual decay of one nation more protracted than the whole date of the existence of any other, derive their source? Still we must revert to the same, and the only satisfactory solution. Secondary causes have been more specially directed in their instance, and throughout the whole of their history, to the promotion of some remarkable result, than in that of any other branch of the human race. If it be asked, why has this been so, the Christian stands in no need of an explanation. On the contrary, he sees in this fact only one link the more in the chain of consistent events; another proof of the Divine superintendence, manifesting itself, as in the earlier ages of the world so in the present, in confirmation of the religion which he acknowledges. On the other hand, the sceptic must add this to the already overcharged list of difficulties with which his cold and hopeless theory is encumbered, and which (as to us it would seem so inconsequentially) he adopts, rather than submit to acknowledge that the sublimest specimen of religious philosophy and of social ethics which the history of human knowledge records could possibly be, under any circumstances, the direct gift of the Creator to his creatures.*

* The great Condè is said to have replied to certain infidel arguments, that it was perfectly vain to assail the credibility of the Christian revelation, so long as so singular a miracle as that of the existing state of the Jewish people could be appealed to in its support. The additional lapse of a century and a half since the death of that eminent person has assuredly not rendered the miracle to which he alluded less convincing.

CHAPTER XVII.

Of the tendency of the prophetic Books of the Old Testament.

THE object of this dissertation being chiefly to point out the general congruity of the Holy Scriptures with themselves, and with the universally acknowledged phenomena of human nature, in other words, to dwell more immediately upon the internal evidence which they bear of their own authenticity, it will scarcely fall within its design to dwell upon the very strong confirmation afforded by prophecy to the truth of Christianity. In a work so limited in compass as the present, it were impossible to do justice to so extensive a subject, and which has already been cogently illustrated in many first-rate standard works:* nor would the minute and circumstantial detail, which such an examination would require, accord with the very general view of the more superficial and popular objections to the credibility of our religion, which is all that is now attempted to be taken. With regard, therefore, to this truly important branch of the Christian evidences, it will be our object to dwell chiefly upon the more broad and general character of the writings of the Jewish prophets, as forming a kind of intermediate dispensation between the Levitical institutions, the strict and formal letter of which they are calculated to spiritualize, and the covenant of the Gospel, of the real nature and destination of which they gave the first clear intimations.

Now, among the foremost impressions left upon our minds by their perusal, is that of the internal

* Few more satisfactory works, in confirmation of the inspiration of Scripture, have appeared within our own time, than that of the Rev. Alexander Keith, entitled "Evidence of the truth of the Christian Religion, derived from the literal fulfilment of prophecy." We know of no work of the same length so well adapted to direct the attention of sceptical minds to the serious investigation of that subject.

proof which they bear of their own authenticity, from the total want of system and definite purpose which they display, and the entire absence of any personal interest or advantage to their respective authors; if we put out of the question the appropriate position which they are calculated to occupy between a religion of types and one of antitypes, between one of ritual expiations and one of spiritual holiness; and the strong testimony which they thus afford retrospectively to the truth of the Mosaic, and prospectively to that of the Christian covenant. It would most assuredly be impossible to account for the composition of the larger and more prominent proportion of these truly remarkable documents, by referring it to the ordinary human motives of self-interest, or of national or personal vanity. That they were not written for the purpose of giving an additional sanction to the Levitical institutions is obvious from the fact, that they frequently speak of them in language so depreciating, as almost to imply a spirit of hostility: whilst, on the other hand, that their object was not that of casting any slur upon the authenticity of that ritual is equally evident, from the fact that they explicitly assert its Divine origin, and attribute the severe visitations which befel their countrymen to the wrath of Providence, for their continued violation of its enactments. Now, admitting that the Jewish prophets were sent into the world at their respective epochs, for the purpose of weaning the public mind gradually from the provisional establishment of Moses, and preparing it for the reception of evangelical truth, all these characteristics which mark their writings are precisely what might have been expected: but, we repeat, no other solution with which we are acquainted would meet the case. Any idea of personal aggrandizement, as the motive of the line adopted by their authors, was again obviously out of the question. To the Jewish community they *must have appeared*, from their continued anticipa-

tions of national calamity and discomfiture, any thing rather than patriotic; and by the uncompromising censure with which they lashed the vices of the sovereigns of the day, they must have expected to draw down, as we know that they actually did, the most violent persecution upon their own heads. Yet with all these apparently unpopular characteristics, their books (such we must presume was the unanswerable evidence of their inspiration at the time of their production) have been received as infallible oracles by the very people whose crimes they denounced, whose religious prejudices they offended, and whose political ruin they foreboded; and, from that day to the present, have been reverentially transmitted from father to son, through every change of evil and good fortune, and referred to in their original language by that inflexible people under almost every possible modification of manners, and in almost every climate of the earth.

The gradual preparation for a new and better system than that of the provisional institutions of Moses, as hinted at by himself, and slowly developed in the subsequent writings of the prophets, seems to have been admirably contrived by Providence, according to the continually shifting circumstances of the Jewish people. Moses, it has been already remarked, alludes to the eventual abrogation of his own ritual by the substitution of the covenant of the Gospel, in language sufficiently precise to satisfy us that he was fully aware that such would be the fact, though in a manner not so prominent as to derogate from the veneration claimed for his own enactments, by announcing more boldly than was expedient their real character. But as time advanced, and when after a course of successive ages the Levitical rites had been sufficiently long established to have completely identified themselves with the national habits, the Almighty appears purposely to have become more and *more explicit in* his intimation of his ultimate purpose.

The substitution of spiritual, in the place of ritual, holiness; the one efficient expiation of sin, destined to be once for all offered and completed in the sufferings and subsequent glorifying of the Messiah, and the communication of the blessings of the Gospel to the Gentiles equally with the Jews, are expressly alluded to so early as the time of David, in many of the Psalms attributed to that monarch and his contemporaries, in a manner obviously calculated to subtract from the then existing reliance upon the efficacy of the sacerdotal sacrifice. "I will not reprove thee," are the words of the 50th Psalm, "for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings, have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goat out of thy folds; for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls upon the mountains, and the wild beasts of the fields are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?* *Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me.*" Again we read in the 40th Psalm, "*Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire: mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, lo I come:* in the volume of the book it is written of me, *I delight to do thy*

* The words of Isaiah are exactly to the same purport. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of goats. When ye come to appear before me, *who hath required this at your hand*, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts *my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.* And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes: cease to do evil, learn to do well; *seek judgment*; relieve the oppressed: judge the fatherless, *plead for the widow.*"—*Isaiah* i. 11. *et. seq.*

will, O my God, yea thy law is within my heart." The 22d Psalm contains so minute a detail of some of the circumstances attending our blessed Saviour's crucifixion as to have the appearance rather of the clear narrative of subsequent history, than the mysterious allusive hints of prophecy; whilst in the latter part of that singular composition, the eventual extension of the benefits of the Redeemer's expiatory atonement to all the nations of the earth is expressly asserted. "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the Governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth (all the potentates of the earth) shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: *and none can keep alive his own soul.*" In proportion as the completion of the time contemplated by Providence drew nearer, this tendency to derogate from the effectiveness of their existing ritual, and to anticipate a more perfect system still hidden in the womb of futurity, becomes more and more evident in the writings of the later prophets. And, accordingly, we know that in consequence of these repeated allusions, all bearing prospectively to the same point, and more especially of those contained in the Book of Daniel, the appearance of a Prince and Saviour was an object of earnest expectation among the Jews at the time of our Redeemer's birth; though from feelings of nationality they were disposed, in direct contradiction to the very prophecies to which they referred, to restrict the object of his mission to their own peculiar nation. Now it cannot be denied that, upon the presumption that the intentions of Providence were what the Christian supposes, this gradual repeal of the earlier covenant, and preparation of the human mind for the promulgation of that which was to displace it, was *wisely* contrived. The system pursued was like that *which* we witness in some of the common operations

of physical nature, where the effete animal organ, which is to be superseded by the substitution of one more complete, detaches itself slowly and almost imperceptibly, and finally drops off when the process for the production of that which is to follow is completed. Another, and no trifling advantage, also, was obtained for the eventual advancement of Christianity by this peculiar arrangement; namely, the confirmation of its authenticity subsequently to its promulgation, by the evidence of previously received prophecy. The same writings which, before the proclamation of the Gospel covenant, seem to have been intended only for the single purpose of weaning the minds of the Jews from a too strong attachment to the mere ceremonial of their law, and of inculcating principles of more substantial holiness, served, after the coming of Christ, to afford the most irrefragable proofs of the reality of his mission. In consequence of this double purpose, which has been answered by the prophetic writings, it is that their importance, as means of instruction, is at this moment as great to the society of Christians as it was originally to the people for whose use they appeared to be more immediately intended: a circumstance in which we trace again another close analogy with the general economy of the Creator, almost all of whose visible works are adapted for the promotion of other and secondary purposes, after the first and more ostensible object has been attained.

Without, then, carrying this part of our argument further than the foregoing observations, and leaving the detailed examination of the actual fulfilment of prophecy, with the unanswerable evidence which it affords in confirmation of the truth of our religion, to the admirable works which have already been written on that subject, it will only be remarked, in this place, with regard to this portion of the Old Testament, as has already been done with respect to the historical books, that every possible theory which we

can suggest as the motive of their production, saving and excepting that which presupposes the truth of Christianity, and the consequent real reference of these writings to that coming dispensation, is full of incongruities and inconsistencies. Why, in the very commencement of the Book of Genesis, a distinct hint should have been given, that a descendant from the first stock of the human lineage should one day prove a means of a reconciliation of man with his Maker; why a repetition of the same promise, but in still more explicit language, should have been recorded as having been made to Abraham and his immediate descendants; why Moses, in giving a law to his people, which at the first aspect seemed destined for perpetuity, and which was made imperative upon the whole lineage of Israel, under the most fearful sanctions, should have distinctly, though incidentally, asserted that it was eventually to be cancelled by one vested with still higher authority; why, as time proceeded, subsequent presumed inspired writers should agree in depreciating that very law, the Divine authority of which they confidently asserted, and finally should almost explicitly, and without disguise or figure, announce the approach of a higher legislator, who was to supersede all existing institutions, and break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile; why those books should have been received as inspired documents by the very people whose sins they denounced, and whose ruin they anticipated, and why, as we know historically to have been the fact, the expectation of the whole Jewish nation should have been eagerly looking for the promised Messiah at the very period of Christ's appearance in the human form; why all this chain of connected circumstances should have existed, if there was really no connecting principle in the actual state of things to produce it, and no concert or combination in the respective parties, it would seem perfectly impossible to explain. *If one main* idea, not brought ambitiously and pro-

minently forward, but couched often in allegorical allusions, often in casual expressions, and in language which until its fulfilment must often have been absolutely inexplicable, be really traceable from first to last, from almost the first page of the first Book of Moses, down to the conclusion of Malachi: if with this single key to decipher each respective composition, all separately become unambiguous in their meaning, and collectively form one consistent whole; and if without that key each part would be at once at variance with itself, and irreconcilable with the others, a tissue of improbable legends, and of unreal, bacause unnecessary, miracles; and if, in addition to this, the grand question of some religion, or no religion, be finally at stake in proportion as we incline to this side, or its opposite, we surely must admit that the combination of probabilities thus arrived at is fully sufficient to command our assent to the confessedly astounding arrangement of human events, which those documents agree in recording. It is not for a moment our wish to deny or conceal what every Christian must have felt, the startling sensation which the recital of such preternatural occurrences as those related in the Scriptures is calculated to produce when considered separately from the great transcendental scheme of which they form the preparatory means. But the cure for such doubts is to be found in considering our religion as a whole; in examining the extent and character of our spiritual necessities; in weighing one seeming contradiction against its contradictory opposite; and in satisfying our minds, that by the demonstrable constitution of our nature, no other alternative is allowed us than that of choosing between the lowest possible state of moral degradation, namely, that of complete irreligion, and the admission of the necessity of some specific Divine arrangement, by which the acknowledged defects of the existing order of things may be met and rectified.

If these, *then*, are the necessary conclusions to

which every earnest examination of our purest moral tendencies, and of the phenomena of the creation, must ultimately lead us, it is obvious that to minds thus prepared the seemingly improbable, because unusual, interferences of the Creator with the course of his own laws, recorded in the sacred writings, lose at once the greater portion of their powers of embarrassment. To a Christian and a Sceptic, accordingly, even where the natural faculties of the understanding may be granted to be essentially equal, the self-same statement of facts upon these points will lead to directly opposite impressions. The former, if he reason conclusively, and with that masculine grasp of mind which neither seeks after unnecessary paradox, nor flinches from the charge of credulity in compliance with the prejudices of the indolent and half-informed, will carefully examine, in the first place, the main and primary propositions of religion, and, if he find them established upon a basis which it is absolutely impossible to overturn, will then be content to take them with all their consequences and accompanying difficulties, and to pursue his course, step by step, from the simplest principles of natural theology to the highest facts of well-attested revelation. But nothing, on the contrary, can be more inconsequential than the reasoning of the anti-Christian Theist. He admits the general proposition of the existence of a Deity, but he ridicules as superstitious every practical attempt to prove his moral superintendence over his own works. He will grant that the universe is wisely put together, yet he is offended at every attempt to demonstrate the workings of that wisdom, by directing our attention to final causes. He is obliged, by a weight of evidence which it is impossible to resist, to admit that the world must have had a beginning, and yet he argues as though the assertion of the possibility of any deviation from the present quiet course of events were the highest absurdity. He is entangled by difficulties at every step. He denies the

mysterious facts of revelation, yet by his own admission he has assented to the far more portentous positions of natural religion, with all their formidable, and, if Christianity be false, unexplained, anomalies. If he can succeed in persuading himself that the recorded miracles of one period are the inventions of a barbarous people, or the fabrications of imposture, he has still to prove the same proposition in like manner of the next, and of the next after them, or he does nothing. If he deny the authenticity of the Jewish records in all their parts, he still has to account for the remarkable fact of the past and present existence of the Jews themselves. If he make a like attack upon the authenticity of the Christian Scriptures, he has again to explain, as he can, the undeniable phenomenon of the first origin and growth of the Christian community itself, challenging inquiry, as we know that it did, in the face of an enlightened and inimical age, as to the reality of the miracles to which it appealed for its warrant, and persevering in its faith in defiance of the outstretched arm of secular power. If, finally, taking the whole records of revelation to pieces, he can establish a seeming detached and occasional improbability in some one part severed from the rest, he has still to explain how and why, by what accident, for contrivance is evidently out of the question, these apparently anomalous members, so astounding when considered separately, should thus happen to combine into one continuous and consistent whole; from what cause is it that, in a retrospect made at this moment of the entire annals of our religion, no contrariety of purpose should be observable in the series, no one link in the chain of contrivance be missing; but that all, from first to last, should appear as the work of one single author, the elaborate developement of one single pervading idea, which, though never forming the ostensible subject matter, should still be traceable alike through the history, the *poetry, the ritual,* and the prophecies of the Jew-

ish nation, till it finally expanded into the completion of the presumed great scheme of Providence in the form of the Christian revelation. Whilst such are the acknowledged difficulties attendant upon theistical scepticism, it surely is not for its professors to pride themselves in their own clear and consistent views, and to charge their believing opponents with credulity and superstition.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Consistency between the Covenant of Moses and that of Christ, as having an expiation for Sin as their leading object. The Levitical expiations were confessedly ineffectual. It must be presumed, therefore, that the great purpose of the Gospel Dispensation was to correct this deficiency. The popular Objections to the Doctrine of Christ's Atonement examined.

THERE is this very striking and obvious distinction between the Mosaic covenant and that of Christ, that, while both claim equally to be a communication from heaven, the former is confessedly, and by its own express admission, a mere preparatory arrangement, adapted to the habits of a single people, for the introduction of a more perfect system; whilst the latter, addressing itself to the whole human race indiscriminately, is declared to be absolutely final, the grand summary of all such theological knowledge as man in this world can ever hope to attain to, and the completion of his reconciliation with God. It is thus that, from their relative position, the one dispensation bears reciprocal evidence to the authenticity of the other. When considered as the nurse and forerunner of Christianity, Judaism acquires a consistency of character, which, if adduced as a dispensation complete and entire in itself, it manifestly could lay no claim to. Its perfection is altogether of a relative and *not of a* positive character. It is precisely what might *have been* expected of the Divine wisdom, when con-

descending to legislate for the temporal, no less than for the spiritual, concerns of an unpolished people, and intent upon occupying a certain, otherwise completely dark, portion in the moral history of our nature, by the establishment of provisional institutions, especially adapted to that peculiar emergency. On the other hand, it bears no one characteristic which would justify us in considering it as intended for the benefit of the whole human race, or for any nation very far advanced in spiritual holiness. Christianity, then, thus considered, comes to us as the continuation and completion of a course of Divine agency, which had been in operation from the very beginning of the world, and which, after a long series of delays and impediments, the result of the opposition afforded to it by man's vices and ignorance, was at length fully developed at the earliest period which would admit of its promulgation. It is thus that the same miracles which originally bore evidence to the truth of the Mosaic mission serve to confirm also that superior form of religion which grew out of it, and finally superseded it; whilst to that strong weight of previous testimony must be added, as accessory and accumulative proof, all the recorded miracles connected with the coming of Christ; those declared to have been performed immediately by himself, and all those stupendous events which were subsequently borne witness to by his first followers and the primitive Church. If, then, the evidence of the authenticity of the Mosaic law, when considered singly, is strong, and strong assuredly it is, that of the certainty of the religion of Christ is still more so, whether we look to the number of miracles to which it can appeal, the intrinsic purity of its precepts, the more spiritual character of the devotional feeling which it inculcates, the advanced state of human manners and knowledge which prevailed at the time of its first establishment, and the much more extensive theatre of human society in which the phenomena of its promulgation were

enacted. Considered, then, retrospectively, as the slow developement of a long series of elaborate contrivances, purchased often by a suspension of the established laws of the universe, and uniformly conducted by the fostering care of its Divine Founder, through every seeming fluctuation of fortune to its final establishment, it suggests a truly awful and appalling idea of the vast importance of the institutions which were thus solemnly introduced. Providence, for the most part, moves onward so quietly and imperceptibly toward the accomplishment of its designs, that we cannot but deem such a striking departure from its usual simplicity of execution, as that here contemplated, as arguing a far more imposing solemnity of purpose than is referable to the ordinary course of events. The vast length and majestic character of the approach which leads to the shrine of Christianity is the strongest possible proof of the sanctity of the mysterious edifice itself. If that dispensation, then, be authentic, it manifestly is one which implies no trivial routine of moral duty or common-place assent of the heart and understanding on our part, nor, in fact, any thing which could, in the course of the workings of Divine wisdom, be produced by a less intricate, and, humanly speaking, more natural process. The inference resulting from this last observation is one of vast importance in the discussion of the question,—what the main object of the Gospel is? because it enables us confidently to pronounce (and that in exact accordance with the most explicit and literal declarations of Scripture) what it is not. Its main end and purport, then, assuredly, is not any thing which fell within the competency of the law of Moses to attain: for, as that law proceeded from the same Divine source, it is self-evident that it would never have been superseded by its Almighty framer, had it contained within itself the means for the effective accomplishment of that *result which* a revelation from heaven must be pre-

sumed to have had in view. "If righteousness could have been by the law," says St. Paul, "then it had not been by faith." This argument is perfectly unanswerable. It is evident, therefore, that if we would arrive at what must, necessarily, have been the great and foremost purpose of the scheme of Christianity, it must be found, by examining what was the specific point which, notwithstanding the holy source from which it proceeded, was left unaccomplished by the ritual law of Moses. Now that mere morals, and in addition to what usually passes under that denomination, a deep impression of the worship and reverence due to the Supreme Being, were inculcated by the Levitical law, almost as fully as in that of Christ himself, is manifest upon the slightest perusal. If we add to the declarations of the Decalogue the numerous beautiful exhortations to acts of mercy and brotherly love, and forgiveness of enemies, which we find interspersed through the Jewish code, some specimens of which have already been extracted in the preceding pages, we arrive at a system of duty with reference to God, and of practical morality with regard to man, very little inferior to the most perfect injunctions comprehended in the New Testament. And even though we admit, as in some respects we are bound to do, the inferiority of the former institutes to the latter in that respect, still, at all events, we see no reason why mere moral and devotional precepts, even of the highest possible perfection, might not, if that were the sole object of the scheme of revelation, have been included in them, without that vast expenditure (if we may venture to use the expression) of continuous miracle which is recorded in the whole series of Scripture, both Jewish and Christian.

No conclusion, then, can be more certain than that, as there is no superfluity in the workings of Divine wisdom, the Christian dispensation must have comprised some ulterior object, higher even than that of the instruction of mankind in its most imperative

principles of duty. But if so, what then was, or what can be imagined to be, that still higher object? Scripture would answer this question for us, even if the inferences of reason were silent. The Mosaic institutions had confessedly two great ostensible purposes in view. Its first and most prominent object was, undoubtedly, the inculcation of holiness,—understanding, by that expression, man's religious submission to the Almighty, and his social morality in the intercourse with his fellow-creatures. On these points the Divine legislator addresses himself with that impressive solemnity and awful purity of idea which might be expected on such a subject, from so august a quarter. But to apprehend our duty is one thing, to perform it, duly and adequately, is another. God may instruct us; and in such a case the lesson will, assuredly, be worthy of its author: but will man always therefore obey? This is the really vital point on which every theory of religion, with the exception of that of the Gospel, is found deficient. It is, in a practical sense at least, necessary that offences should come. What, then, is to be the consequence when wretched human nature is the offender, and the angust Maker of the universe the Judge? With reference, then, to this most perplexing question, the Levitical ritual has a second object, scarcely less elaborately provided for than the first, namely, a system of sacrificial and oblatory expiations, professedly intended for the removal of the spiritual consequences of offences springing from the natural corruption and waywardness of the human heart. It is scarcely necessary to observe, that this part of the Divine law entirely failed of its effect, plainly and simply because, from its inherent worthlessness, it was incompetent to accomplish it. It possessed merely the secondary value of a type, and not the primary and inherent efficacy of an antitype. "It is not possible," says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "that *the blood of* bulls and of goats should take away sins."

The same language had been previously held by all the later inspired penmen of the old covenant. And yet, with the exception of this figurative deprecatory rite, what had human infirmity to offer as the requisite propitiation? God seems, on this occasion, purposely to have called forth, and to have given a momentary sanction to, the utmost of man's limited means of reconciliation, in order that he might more forcibly inculcate the humiliating lesson of its inefficiency, and, by a natural train of thought, eventually lead his mind onward to some more satisfactory process of expiation. What, then, the law of Moses manifestly, because confessedly, aimed at without success, we may be perfectly certain that it was the foremost object of the Christian dispensation to achieve. It is to THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST, therefore, (that mysterious doctrine so much ridiculed by the professed Infidel, and so insidiously impugned by the semi-Christian, that stumbling-block to the timid rationalist of modern times, as it was to the Jew and to the Gentile of old,) that we must look for the one main and prominent idea which is to give consistency, from first to last, to the whole series of revelation. Without this connecting link, this harmonious consummation of a long tissue of preparatory contrivances, Judaism and Christianity must have been considered rather as rival systems, each laying claim to the same miraculous sanctions, and contesting with one another for the supremacy, than as graduated stages in one vast and comprehensive purpose. Even in this advanced period of the world, the purged and scaled eye of the enlightened Christian moralist can find little to amend in the didactic portions of the Mosaic writings, and, considering them solely in this point of view, would be disposed to place them, side by side, with the moral precepts of the Gospel, as concurrent oracles of the Divine will, both of them, respectively, having a claim to his obedience. But *once admit the one* preeminent and momentous truth

here alluded to, as the prominent aim of both the former and the latter dispensations, and immediately all the respective portions of both covenants fall, as it were of their own accord, each into its proper relative position, and, without derogating from the wisdom of purpose displayed in either, contribute to the symmetry of the whole design. On the other hand, deny the justice of the inference, and from that moment it is impossible for us to surmise what was that peculiar characteristic of the Gospel scheme which the spirit of early prophecy so eagerly anticipated, and which, in the fulness of time, was so triumphantly announced to mankind. "Your Father, Abraham," said our blessed Saviour, "rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." What was it, the anticipated sight of which, through a long vista of nearly two thousand years, caused that holy person thus to rejoice? The communication of a mere law of perfect morality, for the amendment of human manners? If so, he might have exulted in the anticipation of the coming of his descendant Moses almost as justly as in that of the more remote Jesus. Was it the revelation of the great doctrine of the soul's immortality? Setting aside the connexion between the establishment of this doctrine and Christ's expiatory sacrifice for sin, there seems to be no assignable reason why this important truth should not have been directly communicated by revelation to Abraham himself; and still less can we see why it should not have been inserted among the acknowledged sanctions of the Mosaic law. If, then, it was withheld from the prior dispensations, whilst it formed an integral constituent of the latter covenant of the Gospel, the reason must have been, because the Gospel contains what the ritual law does not contain. But what was the distinguishing feature of the Christian scheme must be admitted also to have been its foremost purpose. The mysterious propitiation of Christ evidently constitutes the former;

we, therefore, reasonably conclude it to have been the latter.

Nothing, then, surely can be more inconsequential than the reasoning of those persons who, assenting to the general truth of the Holy Scriptures, would cut out from them this their essential and peculiar doctrine. Such inconsistency, however, exists, as we all know, among many professed believers in revelation. That it does so exist we can account for only by that unfortunate tendency in mankind to measure the extraordinary agency of Providence, in momentous and extreme cases, by the standard of common occurrences, and more especially by the want of large and comprehensive views of the general tenor of Scripture; in other words, by the habit unhappily so prevalent with a large portion of readers, of selecting from the whole mass of the sacred writings such passages as accord with their own preconceived views, and acknowledging nothing for revealed truth but what, without the aid of revelation, might have been plausibly assumed as the probable system of Providence, by the mere effort of unassisted reason.

The great doctrine, then, of Christ crucified for the sins of the whole world, being the one main proposition which constitutes the essential characteristic of Christianity, it is obvious, that upon a right apprehension of this fundamental principle must depend the accuracy and soundness of our conclusions, with respect to all the collateral and consequential inferences deducible from it. The chief cardinal point being established, the harmonious connexion which combines the whole theory of the Gospel covenant into one consistent whole becomes immediately traceable. This consideration will justify our recapitulating, in this place, in some detail, and at the risk of the charge of prolixity, the arguments deducible from reason and from Scripture in its support.

The books of the Old and of the New Testament then, *it may, in the* first place, be observed, have

each their one peculiar and leading idea to establish, which, like the respective portions of a tally, correspond with and illustrate each other: that of the former covenant is the fall of man, with all its consequences of moral degradation and alienation from God; that of the latter is the mode adopted by our Maker, for the ultimate correction of human depravity, and for our final reconciliation with him. Now it has been already laid down, as a preliminary rule, in all theological discussions, that it is perfectly vain, if not impious, in us, where the facts of our moral position are palpably and demonstrably certain, to be inventing theories and suggesting modes, by which we conceive that the ends of Providence might have been more cheaply and more expeditiously accomplished, than by those which we find experimentally to have been adopted. With regard, therefore, to the continually recurring question, why man was not originally placed, as we have reason to believe that some higher orders of intellectual beings have been placed, in a condition of sufficient moral elevation to secure him from the risk of forfeiture, and why it has been so arranged that he should previously fall, and be subsequently raised, only at the cost of much painful discipline and hazard, to that very state in which, had God so pleased, he might originally have found himself, our answer is, that questions of this nature are irrelevant to the real object of discussion. A sound theory of religion, we repeat, is not that which lends itself to all the caprices of a fantastic imagination ranging through the vast field of presumed possibilities, but which, taking for granted, and stating fairly the undoubted phenomena of our nature, supplies from some adequate, and therefore, as it would seem, necessarily superhuman, source, the information how such a state of things is compatible with the workings of infinite wisdom and goodness. As, then, it were mere captiousness to allege arguments against the *probability* of the fact of man's first fall from a state

of innocence, so long as we are practically certain that at all events our present moral constitution is precisely such as it would be, were that statement demonstrably true, so assuredly it must be equally unreasonable to adduce objections against the doctrine of Christ's atonement, if the unanswerable test of experiment unite with the express assertion of Scripture, in assuring us, that no means of extrication from our present degraded condition ever have been, or in the nature of things appear possible to be, suggested, excepting such as have a vicarious expiation for their base. That such is really the case will perhaps appear probable from the following considerations.

In the first place, it may be safely asserted, that the obvious purport of a vast number of passages, both of the Old and New Testament, when taken in their most literal interpretation, suggests the theory of an expiatory atonement for sin, independent, in some degree, of the actual internal merit of human actions; because thus much is confessed by even the most strenuous impugners of this doctrine, who, in other respects, profess to receive the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. It is on the intrinsic improbability of an arrangement which they assume to be incompatible with the workings of infinite wisdom, that such persons almost uniformly found their opposition to it; and, on the strength of that principle, they conceive themselves justified in explaining away, or taking in a metaphorical sense, assertions, the direct inference deducible from which they admit would authorize the assumption of its truth. It cannot, therefore, be considered as begging the question, if we take the apparently affirmative language of revelation for granted, leaving to our opponents the salvo, if tenable, of considering those expressions as merely figurative, which, unless we are willing to deprive Holy Writ of most of its essential value, and of all its *consistency*, we conceive must be received as

literal. With this assumption, then, on our part, we would observe, that the most hardy opponents of the doctrine of the atonement, who at the same time profess their belief in a future state of rewards and punishments, must necessarily rest their hostility to it on one or more of the following grounds. Either they must, in the first place, be ready to assert that human nature can maintain that uniform degree of innocence and holiness which Christianity requires, and which would serve to qualify the soul for a future state of heavenly blessedness, by its own natural powers of perfect obedience to an absolutely perfect law, and thus that it stands in no need of an external expiation:—or, secondly, they must show that repentance, when sincere, is a sufficient substitute for the before-mentioned qualities:—or, thirdly, that it is not inconsistent with our notions of a perfect moral and holy Creator to overlook, in some degree, from his mere grace and free-will, the distinctions between vice and virtue, and to bestow upon the former the rewards which would seem due only to the latter:—or, fourthly, they must be content to suppose a congruity between the ultimate destination of mankind hereafter, and their present very imperfect and subordinate position here: in other words, they must depart from the broad principle of Christian belief, and conceive the heaven, assigned even to the best men in a future state, like the Elysium of the poets, to be such merely as the experimentally feeble powers of obedience allotted to our nature would be competent to earn. The three former of these propositions, it will be readily observed, are encumbered each with their respective difficulties, as completely repugnant to our notions of the Divine attributes as any which can be alleged against that doctrine which they are intended to overthrow: the last of them is, in fact, giving up the question altogether, since, as was just now observed, it is nothing more than the *denial of* a future state of perfection, such as the Gos-

pel exhorts us to aspire to, and the substitution in its place of a subordinate existence, little different in character and circumstances from that through which we are now passing.

> Quæ gratia curruum
> Armorumque fuit vivis, quæ cura nitentes
> Pascere equos, eadem sequitur tellure repostos.

Now the first of the foregoing suppositions, namely, that perfect obedience, and such a degree of holiness as would qualify for the joys of the heaven revealed in the Scriptures, are really within the reach of man's natural powers to attain, is obviously one which clashes with the uniform experience of mankind in all ages: and even supposing it to be conditionally and possibly true, is, at all events, known to be practically false. The presumed good man of such a creed as that here assumed, would be like the wise man of the Stoics, a mere abstract creature of the imagination, of which we find nothing like a counterpart in the existing order of things. Not only do we find it impossible to point out, either in the records of past history, or within our own times, any one human being whom we should be justified in considering as a perfect specimen of what we ought to be, taking the Christian code of morals as our standard; but, in the next place, even if such a faultless monster could here or there be found, it would still by no means prove the point in question. It is self-evident, that perfect intrinsic holiness can deserve that appellation only when it subsists independently of any external help and excitement, and acts entirely by its own free-will, unoperated upon either by the hope of reward or the fear of punishment. But here is at once the assumption of an impossibility. We know, practically, that the influence of external motives, such as those now alluded to, extends frequently not merely to the prevention of any positive overt acts of sin, where the heart is confessedly hardened, but that it *also, by* habitually checking the first com-

mencement of evil thoughts, creates within us a feeling of innocence to which, in strictness, we can lay no claim. The general conviction that, under the actually existing circumstances which respectively modify every man's power of action, the practical commission of any gross overt act of sin is impossible, is generally quite enough to prevent, during the continuance of that impossibility, the inclination to sin from suggesting itself to the imagination. Precisely as the pressure of the atmosphere, by its action upon the elastic and resisting forces of the compound materials of the globe, keeps them in a state of permanent inaction, which appears natural to them only because they have no opportunity of displaying the powers of destruction with which they are really invested, so in like manner the hopes and apprehensions of religion, the powerful influence of public opinion, and the consequently superinduced restraint of habit, all silently combine to keep in a quiescent state those turbulent passions of the human breast which, were that influence removed, would assuredly break out into impetuous action. The fact of our own innocence, therefore, even when we feel ourselves most justified in pleading it, is but a negative argument at the best. That we are ignorant of ourselves is one of the most trite, because it is one of the most certain, maxims of ethical wisdom. The fact is, that no man knows the real and fearful extent of his own weakness till he has been effectually tried. But it is obvious that in this world a complete trial of the purity and strength of our principles is impossible, because we have no means of acting independently of those many restraints with which Providence has, in its wisdom, surrounded us, and to which even the best men must owe no small portion of their apparent innocence. The more we know of our own nature, by means of the melancholy conviction which is occasionally forced upon us by our own lapses, and the more we acquire the habit of measuring even our

best motives by the standard of the eternal rules of Divine morals, the more deeply are we necessarily impressed with the conviction of one inability to attain to any thing deserving the name of positive holiness, by our natural powers. A person in fetters might as justly boast of his abstaining from acts of violence, as a human being, however innocent he may appear externally, take merit to himself for that abstinence from guilt which the mercies of his Creator have fortunately put out of his power, and perhaps also, at the same time, refused him the inclination to commit. Now that such a being, the greater part of whose demerits are of a positive, whilst his apparent merits are merely of a negative, character, should aspire, through his exertions, to the rewards of heaven, appears a palpable absurdity. And yet such is the absurdity maintained by those persons who teach that the whole object of the Christian revelation is the inculcation of a perfect law of morals, our complete obedience to which is to be our passport to the joys of eternity.

But this self-same argument is open to other, and not less insuperable, objections. If one truth is more certain than another, both from natural reason and the express assertions of Scripture, it is this, that the knowledge of the principles of morality and religion is the cause, because without it we should not possess the capability, of sin. The more perfect, therefore, that knowledge is, provided the original waywardness and perversity of our moral faculties remain unaltered, the more glaring will be our disobedience, and consequently our guilt, and through that guilt, our eventual responsibility. Need we ask, why we abominate in our fellow-creatures the self-same sanguinary spirit which we pardon in the wild beast of prey? Why we spare the mischievous idiot, whilst we punish the deliberate robber and murderer? This is a distinction which the lowest grade of uncivilized man is capable of *making*, and the certainty of which the

merest infant can perceive. The natural conscience of mankind requires not to be told that a previous acquaintance with a prohibitory rule, and a conviction that that rule which we violate, has a claim to our obedience, is necessary to constitute guilt; in other words, that it is impossible to rebel against authority, of the existence and legitimacy of which we are ignorant. This argument, however, if correct, is at once fatal to the theory of those persons who would inculcate that the promulgation of the Gospel covenant meant nothing more, and, in fact, is nothing more, than the annunciation of a moral law, only rendered more impressive and more binding upon the conscience than any similar codes which have preceded it, in consequence of its having been proclaimed by Divine authority, and ratified by the operation of miracles. What, it will naturally be asked in reply, is the benefit accruing to mankind from the revelation of the Divine morality of the Gospel, if, after all, it leaves man in point of practical obedience precisely where it found him? If, after having shown his incompetency to obey an imperfect law, he finds this elaborate arrangement of Providence only adding to his task, and calling him to the performance of still higher duties than those which have already been found to exceed his strength? In fact, the hypothesis of the rationalist Christian, as he styles himself, involves so many untenable propositions, that it is perfectly surprising that it should be so confidently urged as it has been, and still is, as a sufficient demonstration of the unreasonableness of the doctrine of Christ's atonement. That its assertors, in order to accommodate their principles to the declarations of Scripture, are often reduced to the necessity of explaining away and distorting the literal expressions of Holy Writ, they themselves, when urged, cannot but admit. But they plead the paradoxical character *attaching*, as they conceive, to the notion of a vicarious atonement as their justification. Let them, then,

at least, be candid, and state paradox against paradox. Let them weigh the merits and probability of the theory which they would establish, against that which they would propose to overthrow. So far as the foregoing argument goes, it is clear that their attempt at explanation is more perplexing and contradictory than the original proposition. In reply, therefore, to the arguments of the Socinian, our conclusion is, that we adhere to the great dogma of Christ's expiatory atonement as a necessary superaddition to the mere practical morality of the Gospel; in the first place, because the admission of that doctrine is more consistent with the literal assertions of the inspired books, wherever they occur; secondly, because it appears to be the one connecting idea which pervades the Jewish no less than the Christian Scriptures; and, in the third place, because, when fairly stated, it is more satisfactory to our reason, than any rival theory built upon the assumed effectiveness of human merit. We do not, indeed, for a moment intend to assert that the theory, the Divine truth of which we are now vindicating, is not itself accompanied with many, and to us inexplicable, difficulties: all that we wish to be understood as saying is merely this, that under the present view of the subject, the opposite opinion is perplexed with far more obvious and more unanswerable objections.

We have not, however, yet done with the argument of the Socinian rationalists. Granting that the moral theory of the Gospel affords a rule of life too perfect for human performance, and, consequently, admitting as, at least, a practical truth, that even the holiest individuals will occasionally be found chargeable with the sin of disobedience, still they urge that there are other modes of reconciliation with God, far more consistent with the purity and benevolence of the Divine attributes than that mysterious one which we are now advocating. Sincere repentance, they argue, seems to afford so natural and reasonable a

satisfaction for sin, as completely to preclude us from supposing that Providence could possibly have adopted so extremely elaborate and painful a process of reconciliation as that now supposed, where the same end might at once have been arrived at by far easier, and as it would seem to our limited judgment, less objectionable means. There, is, we readily concede, much plausibility, and, to those who are content to form their permanent opinions from their more obvious *prima facie* impressions, we will add, much appearance of probability in this statement: but, at the same time, we are satisfied that, when duly examined, it will be found to be no less untenable and unsatisfactory than the one which we have already discussed in the preceding pages. Without dwelling upon the fact of the probably extreme rarity, we might, perhaps, say impossibility, of any sincere repentance entirely uninfluenced by the fear of future punishment, and such other external motives as would materially deduct from its intrinsic desert; but allowing their fullest possible value to such sentiments of contrition as our nature in its purest moments may be supposed capable of feeling, still we can trace nothing in such a state of mind which would, in the slightest degree, justify us in cherishing, on that account, such exalted hopes respecting our future destination as the covenant of the Gospel warrants in the case of those who really adopt it as their only means of salvation. The utmost value which can fairly be attributed to repentance is, after all, of a negative, not of a positive, character. It may, perhaps, indeed, should it not happen through the admixture of human infirmity to be of that equivocal kind which itself requires to be repented of, replace us in a situation equivalent with that of the innocence from which we have strayed. But the very nature of the case here appears to draw the boundary line which limits our admission. It may, in the arrangements of the Divine mercy, cancel the penalties attached to disobedience, and thus save

us from punishment; but under no probable supposition can it elevate itself into actual merit. David, we can readily conceive, ceased, in consequence of the sincerity of his contrition, to be a murderer and adulterer in the sight of God, but we cannot suppose also that he therefore stood higher in the favour of his Maker than he would have done had he never sinned in that manner at all. The object of a broken and repentant spirit is to solicit an amnesty, not to earn a reward. Its inadequacy, therefore, to serve as a qualification to fit us for sharing the inconceivable joys prepared for the souls of just men made perfect, is obvious. For such a qualification, if it exist any where, we must look beyond the limits of human nature, and of mere mortal excellence, for assuredly it is not to be found within that line. But if our appeal must be to external resources, it would be difficult to show in what consists the objection to the doctrine of the expiation for sin purchased by the merits and sufferings of Christ, as taught in the Holy Scriptures; or rather, it would be difficult to point out any other possible means of reconciliation, which, so far as human reason can venture to judge, would seem so completely adequate to meet the exigency of the case in question. Such, then, appears to be the value of the argument which has been so confidently advanced respecting the sufficiency of repentance alone, as a means of effective righteousness, and for the purpose of withdrawing our hope from him, "who, being made perfect, became the author of salvation unto all them that obey him."

Let us then pass on to the next assumption, by the aid of which the impugners of the doctrine of the atonement imagine that they can prove that mysterious arrangement to be an unnecessary, and, therefore, an improbable dispensation in the workings of Providence. Admitting the defectiveness of all human works on the score of merit, and the inadequacy of mere *repentance to do* more than to avert the penalties

of misconduct, still it is asked, may not God, of his own grace and free will, consistently bestow the rewards of heaven upon such portions of mankind, as by the comparative excellence of their conduct may have approached most nearly to the standard of absolute perfection? Why should Divine wisdom prefer the circuitous to the shorter and easier road to his object, where the ultimate destination is in both cases the same? The first and fittest answer to such an argument is still that which takes shelter in human ignorance, and presumes not to pronounce upon what may, or what may not, be compatible with the views of the Creator of the universe. If, however, we are called upon to reply to this statement of the question, we need not hesitate for a moment in asserting, that all which we can venture to surmise as probable on these mysterious topics must be grounded upon our own experience of the acknowledged order of things, and that, building upon the data supplied by that experience, we conceive the direct presumption in in this case to be in favour of what we may maintain to be the palpable scriptural doctrine. If we can assume it as probable, that the Almighty Judge will, in his future award of our eternal allotment, proceed by any other than the inflexible rule of retribution, and make our salvation depend rather upon a gratuitous act of amnesty than upon the strict observance of some wisely arranged system, there seems to be no assignable reason why we should have been placed in this world of probation at all: and why, without incurring the risk of possible failure, and without any reference to our moral exertions, we should not at once have had our allotment of heavenly blessedness from the very commencement of our existence. Now it is certain that God has not taken this course with us up to the present moment; it is, therefore, arguing in the very teeth of positive experience to assume that he will pursue it in his dealings with *us hereafter*. We are sure, as we are of the fact of

our own existence, that he has placed us for the present in a state of trial. The inference, therefore, is direct, that upon that trial must, in some degree, depend our ultimate destination. And yet the rigorous enforcement of a retributive rule would obviously, under the actual degraded circumstances of human nature, be attended with the most fearful result. "If thou, Lord! wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?" We see no possible escape from this dilemma, excepting in the hope of some auxiliary arrangement, which, whilst it will stamp every deviation from the rule of right with the severest moral reprobation, may in crushing the offence spare the offender. Here again, then, the doctrine of Christ's atonement affords the only seeming solution of the difficulty. In asserting thus much, we do not pretend to shut our eyes to the startling impression produced upon our minds by the first exposition of the doctrine of a vicarious sacrifice for sin; but still we are deliberately convinced, that so far as we can see our way through the maze of conflicting probabilities and improbabilities, which beset the questions of theology, the adoption of the literal interpretation of Scripture on this occasion as the true one, is the theory which best accords with our most reasonable assumptions respecting the Divine arrangements.

It has, however, been repeatedly asserted that the doctrine of Christ's atonement cannot possibly be true, because its obvious tendency is to make men more prone to commit sin, in proportion as it removes the apprehension of subsequent punishment. This, undoubtedly, is a grave charge, and if well founded would be fatal to the notion, that such a dispensation could really proceed from the pure source of Divine holiness. Plausible, however, as this assertion may seem, it scarcely need to be remarked to any person tolerably acquainted with the real tenor of Scripture, and *not deriving his* opinions at second hand from the

partial statements of others, how totally remote this allegation is from the real truth. If any one event, among all the mysterious dealings of God's Providence, could more than any other mark his entire and deep abomination of sin, it is that, *that he has not thought the personal sufferings of his only begotten Son too high a price to pay for its expiation.* Startled as we may be at the awful nature of the sacrifice, there is no escaping from the inference that, granting the reality of the fact, nothing can be more irreconcilable with the purity of the Divine mind than acts of wickedness in his intellectual creatures. If, then, he has adopted this stupendous mode of displaying his abhorrence of sin, it is evident that the very means which were intended by him to purge away the pollution introduced by it cannot, without the most heinous blasphemy, be supposed to operate positively towards its encouragement. The truth, in reality, is entirely on the opposite side. The doctrine of the atonement, to those who apprehend it rightly, so far from relaxing the obligations of morality, is, on the contrary, the source of a great variety of virtues, of which not only would our nature be otherwise incapable, but of which it could not even conceive the idea. And to this single fact, that it vastly enlarges our original capability of moral improvement by the holier motives and the sublimer views which it inculcates, we may confidently appeal, as a proof that it has its foundation in truth; it being impossible to imagine that the faculties of either the head or the heart could be permanently amended by a superstitious fiction, or an impious falsehood. There is certainly no one dogma of revelation so entirely calculated to sober every feeling of arrogance respecting our own deserts;—to sink us in the deepest humiliation from the recollection that our sins have all of them respectively had their share in producing the fearful necessity of this great sacrifice;—to teach us to look with commiseration upon the infirmities of

others, from the recollection that we ourselves are common criminals together with them in the sight of our Maker; to impress us with a solemn conviction of the duty of extending to the offences committed against our own persons that mercy which we so anxiously implore at the hands of the Almighty;—and to fill us with the warmest sentiments of gratitude for the immensity of the Divine goodness displayed in so remarkable a manner, as this article of our belief which we are in the daily habit of hearing vilified and misrepresented. Let it be observed, moreover, that we may appeal also to one of the most universal and most deep rooted moral instincts of human nature in confirmation of the same doctrine. The general prevalence even of the grossest abuse of a principle is justly considered by the soundest philosophers as confirmatory of the existence and of the reasonableness of the principle itself. Now the mortifications of asceticism, which have formed so large a proportion of almost every modification of religion in all ages, from the human sacrifices of the idolatrous Canaanites, and the self-inflictions of the Fakirs and Brahmins of the East, to the purgatorial fires of the Platonists and of the Church of Rome, are all pregnant with proof that the theory of an expiation for sin, under some modification or other, is natural to the mind of man. Once admit that any tendency of the heart and understanding is nearly coextensive with the whole human race, and we may safely lay it down as a general rule, that a theory which asserts the reality of the principle as a legitimate law of Providence, and which only limits the abuse to which, from the weakness of our intellect, it were otherwise prone, is much more likely to be the true one than that which would explain it away altogether. Thus, the very abominations of idolatry, as it is found among the most savage tribes, afford a strong confirmation of the assertion that religion is natural to the human reason; and the fantastic terrors of superstition are

only a perversion of the great truth, that there is a retributive Being, who will one day judge the world in righteousness. Why, then, may we not take a lesson from the pertinacious principle of monkery* itself, which assumes that moral guilt can be completely cancelled only by suffering in some shape or other, and admit that it is right in its theory, though it is mischievously wrong in its application? If we will not be content without the why and the wherefore in any of our religious opinions, it is not the doctrine

* Nothing more strongly marks the instinctive pertinacity with which the human mind clings to the theory of the expiation of sin by the means of corporeal inflictions than the fact that the Church of Rome, even while acknowledging the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, has thought fit to assert as equally necessary articles of belief the doctrine of purgatory and that of ascetic mortifications. The following melancholy anecdote, related by Huet, the accomplished Bishop of Avranches, respecting one of his own sisters, affords a singular illustration of the strength of this feeling, and the frightful absurdity and misery to which it may lead when misdirected from its legitimate object:—"Ce fut-là (au monastère de Sainte Croix) que cette jeune fille renonçant au monde, se consacra à Dieu, et fut si pénétrée de son amour, que pour se rendre plus agréable à ses yeux, s'abandonnant bien plus à son zèle qu'aux conseils de ses directeurs, elle chercha des mortifications nouvelles; les pratiques ordinaires ne lui semblant pas remplir toute l'étendue du désir qu'elle avoit de souffrir pour Dieu; sachant d'ailleurs, que des Saints inspirés de Dieu avoient pris quelquefois des routes écartées pour s'avancer dans les voies du ciel. Ayant ouï dire qu'une extrême soif étoit une des plus grandes peines que la nature pût supporter, elle résolut de s'abstenir entièrement de boire. Pour garder le secret sur cet étrange dessein, elle renversoit adroitement sous la table du refectoir la portion de breuvage qu'on lui avoit servie. Cette conduite ne pouvoit pas aller loin, et la nature succomba bientôt à une si terrible épreuve; son témperament fut entièrement ruiné; toutes les parties de son corps furent troublées dans leurs fonctions, et sa peau fut si brûlée qu'elle devoint noire et sèche comme un parchemin. Les médecins à qu'il fallut avoir recours, ne pouvoient deviner la cause des étranges symptômes qu'ils remarquoiant, et ils ne la connurent que quand la malade fut obligée, par l'autorité de ses supérieurs, et par les devoirs de sa conscience, de leur découvrir le mystère. Mais elle le découvrit, lorsque le mal étoit sans remède, et peu de jours avant sa mort. Ce fut alors qu'en rendant compte de sa conduite et de ses mortifications, elle dit qu'un jour dans la cruelle altération qu'elle sentoit, voyant un porceau se vautrer dans la boue, et avaler à pleine gorge l'eau mêlée avec la fange, elle lui portoit envie, et souhaitoit de pouvoir prendre part à cette boisson. Dieu avoit doué cette sainte fille de rares talens. Elle avoit un esprit transcendant, &c." Ought we not to cherish with respect and gratitude a doctrine of our faith which gives to these powerful and natural feelings their proper direction, and erects into the sublimest devotional fervour of a grateful and humble heart principles which, under the operation of an *ill-regulated* judgment, would lead only to misery and degradation?

of Christ's atonement only which will be erased from our rule of faith; but every article of our belief, not excepting those of natural religion itself, will successively disappear, till the whole superficies of our moral character will, eventually, become one entire blank. The more, then, we examine this first and main proposition of Christianity, the more deeply shall we find its roots to be fixed, not merely in the obvious phraseology, of the sacred writings, and in the general consistency of revelation with itself, but in the wants, and tendencies, and instinctive aspirations of our whole spiritual constitution. We find it to be accordant with our nature in its present position, and the inference is inevitable, that it forms an integral portion of the arrangements of Providence, however inadequate our understanding may be to discover why such was the peculiar mode by which our Creator thought fit to work out the eventual happiness of his creatures.

Finally, it may be observed that this fundamental dogma of the Christian dispensation exactly tallies and harmonizes with what we read, as having constituted the first recorded event of revealed religion in the Old Testament: namely, the corruption of the whole human race by the sin of Adam. If there is any thing repugnant to our moral notions in the idea of the communication of sin from one individual to many, and such must be admitted to be the first impression conveyed by a hasty glance upon this mysterious topic, it at least affords some solution of our perplexity, if we are bound, also, by the self-same authority, to admit that a parallel course of arrangement which permitted the introduction of the disease, contrived by an exactly similar process to accomplish the cure. If we grant the truth of the former of these recorded events, it seems impossible to withhold our assent as to the reality of the latter. And such is the view taken of the subject by St. Paul in his Epistle to *the Romans*, where he cogently argues that if the

methods of the Divine government could allow sin and death to spread over the whole human race through the disobedience of one, much more may we be assured that it cannot be incompatible with the dispensations of the merciful Father of the human race to permit a coextensive system of reconciliation to be communicated to mankind through the imputed righteousness of one.

CHAPTER XIX.

Of the Divinity of Christ.

THE doctrine of the divinity of our blessed Saviour appears naturally, even were the express affirmatory declarations of Scripture out of the question, to grow out of that of his satisfactory atonement for the sins of mankind. Without presuming to speculate largely upon the internal probability of these transcendental problems, we may, perhaps, with all humility, venture to observe thus much; that granting the reality of that expiatory sacrifice, there would seem to be something less inconsistent with our first natural impressions, in the idea of the Deity, himself submitting, from a principle of mercy, to pay a penalty for the sins of mankind in his own person, than in that of his subjecting one of his own innocent creatures to punishment for the sake of other creatures confessedly guilty. It also seems difficult to imagine that the expiation afforded by any finite being could be so extensive in its effects as that of Christ is stated by revelation to be. Arguments, indeed, of this description ill become the spirit of diffidence with which it behoves creatures like ourselves to approach to the contemplation of the writings of infinity. They are, therefore, adduced in this place solely and merely for the purpose, not of throwing light upon what is con-

fessedly inexplicable, but of meeting the conflicting assertions of those, who, building their arguments upon the presumed conclusions of their own intellect, have assailed the doctrine of Christ's divinity as too palpably improbable to be admitted by rational beings under the guarantee of any external testimony whatever. Our wish is only to balance assumption against assumption, and to repel the self-complacent opinion of the followers of Socinus, that, however the letter of Scripture may be against them, its spirit and sound reason are for them. Within these limits, and on this defensive principle exclusively, can these high topics afford matter for justifiable discussion. The real appeal of every mind, duly sensible of its own weakness, must, after all, be to what it finds expressly written; and we have no hesitation in asserting, that we do find the doctrine now alluded to stated in holy writ, with a decision and clearness of expression, which, if we admit the authenticity of the various passages in which it occurs, is at once decisive of the fact in question.

CHAPTER XX.

Of Sanctification by the Holy Spirit.

When Scripture inculcates the necessity of the sanctification of the human soul, by the strengthening aid of the Holy Spirit, it adds another harmonizing and consistent truth to the great and concurrent doctrine of Christ's atonement. It has already been observed, that, although our Redeemer came to reconcile God to man by annulling the penalties otherwise consequent upon the inevitable infirmities of our nature, it were to derive a blasphemous conclusion from that doctrine, were we to assert that its practical effect could possibly be that of relaxing prospectively

the obligations of morality, or of rendering sin less offensive to the Divine nature than it had previously been. On the contrary, nothing, as we have shown, could more completely demonstrate the imperative duty imposed upon us of pursuing all attainable holiness by every possible means, than the tremendous cost which revelation teaches us has already been incurred in consequence of man's past disobedience. Rightly considered, then, the satisfaction afforded to the inflexible principle of moral retribution, by the expiatory merits of Christ, is one solemn obligation the more to a course of undeviating obedience. But if the corruption of the human heart continues after the promulgation of the Gospel covenant precisely what it was before that important epoch, the subsequent history of mankind would probably be little more than that of a repetition of the same follies and crimes which have already spread such extensive devastation over the works of the Creator. The same causes would naturally produce the same effects; and, therefore, whatever might be believed of the future destination of man in another life, as a consequence of the disarming of the Divine justice, his moral character in this world would seem to derive little apparent benefit from the institution of a purer code of morality than that which he has already so audaciously violated. Now the provision which Scripture assures us has through the medium of the Gospel dispensation, been made for us in this point, namely, with reference to the actual improvement of our spiritual nature in this world, appears exactly calculated to meet this difficulty. The nearer any practical rule of life approaches toward the standard of perfection, the greater will, of course, be the degree of moral exertion and self-possession necessary for the accomplishment of the task which it imposes. The provisions made for us by revelation here again are remarkable for their admirable adaption to the wants of our nature. In the Old Testament, and in the books

of the Levitical law more especially, we find little allusion to any other mode of justification than that of ritual observances; and with regard to the sanctification of the soul, in like manner the natural strength of the human heart seems to be not unfrequently appealed to, as possessing, within itself, the means of obedience. In proportion, indeed, as the Jewish Scriptures draw towards their close, the principles which they inculcate gradually assume, in all respects, a more evangelical character. Other and better expiations than those prescribed by Moses begin to be anticipated, and the accompanying Christian doctrine, of the assistance afforded to the active powers of man by the Divine grace, to be more prominently asserted. The full and complete developement of this latter doctrine, however, like the former one of the atonement of Christ, is reserved for the Gospel dispensation to inculcate. When, accordingly, we turn from the Old to the New Testament, we there find the almost entire moral helplessness of our nature laid down, from first to last as a fundamental maxim. The reward of our obedience, and the means of our obedience, are both described as the unbought gift of God. These are the two concurrent truths upon which the whole structure of Christianity is built. The very best actions of which we are capable have all of them a taint of sin, and, therefore, in all we do, we stand in need of an atonement to make our imperfect actions acceptable with our Maker:—the thoughts of our hearts are far gone from righteousness, and accordingly we cannot elevate them to spiritual things, we cannot apprehend nor love the new duties we are called upon to perform, but through the co-operating Divine assistance. It is thus that the ruling principle of the Gospel is the direct reverse of that which formed the basis of heathen, and in great measure of Jewish virtue. The highest notions of moral excellence entertained by the philosophers of Greece and Rome were those of human nature pondering with

haughty self-complacence upon its own comparative refinement, and looking proudly down upon the herd of common beings still immersed in the follies and vices of ignorance. The virtue of the good man of the Old Testament is not, indeed, of this offensively proud character, yet even there we occasionally meet with an assumption of merit by individuals, which, however accordant with the then acknowledged standard of excellence, forms an unseemly contrast with the meek principles of the religion of Christ. Of this latter dispensation, unmixed humility is the great, it may almost be said to be the only, rule of conduct. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Such were the words with which our Redeemer opened his commission, and to the same purport was his final parting valediction. It is manifest, then, that any claim advanced by human beings on the score of actual desert to the approbation of the Deity and the joys of heaven are at complete variance with the Christian system. The area of duty which is committed to the superintendence of each of us by the sublime code of evangelical morals is confessedly larger than our scanty powers can occupy. In this state of original helplessness, accordingly, one resource only remains open to us: to throw ourselves, with all our infirmities, upon the Divine help. To supplicate our Maker that he will, in his mercy, enable us to do that which from our own natural powers we are unable to perform. This is what the dictates of plain reason would tell us is the proper course to be pursued; it is also what the Gospel expressly urges us to do, whilst, at the same time, it assures us, that they who ask for the aid of God's strengthening Spirit shall never ask in vain. It is thus, that in the spiritual world revealed to us by the Gospel, precisely as in the natural world, the further and the closer we examine, the more palpably we find *God to be* all in all. Our first glance at the works of *the creation* presents to us the idea of a series of

efficient secondary causes all working by their own agency their respective results. As we advance further we find the existence of those presumed causes inadequate to account for the stupendous results which we had attributed to them, and are compelled to acknowledge the finger of the Creator as the main directing principle. So likewise in the contemplation of the astounding problems of theology, in proportion as our knowledge of the arrangements of Providence dilates, our sense of our own importance dwindles, till it shrinks actually into nothing. In every thing, in our seeming strength no less than in our weakness, we feel the necessity of the Divine support.

Now, it is self-evident, that if by the natural powers of the understanding we could work our way from the first and simplest up to the highest and most abstruse principles of religious morality, this conclusion, which is precisely that of Christianity, the discovery of this golden chain, which in all things connects man indissolubly with his Maker, is what we should eventually arrive at. We know, indeed, experimentally, that these truths are placed too high for human attainment by the mere natural powers of the intellect, because we know that their first discovery was contemporaneous with the promulgation of Christianity: but still, looking back upon them as matters of revelation, we cannot but perceive their entire consistency, and feel that they are the points where intellectual research ought in its happiest and most illuminated moments to terminate. It is then, assuredly, no small proof of the internal probability of the truth of the Christian system, that the main propositions which it asserts are those to which the highest moral research would lead us; and that the helps which it pledges itself to supply are exactly those which our spiritual wants and weaknesses would most earnestly demand. We cannot perform a perfect and spotless action if we would; we, therefore, *want a Redeemer*:—we cannot detach our

thoughts from the absorbing influence of wordly matters and fix them steadily upon heavenly objects by any natural power that we possess; and we, therefore, stand equally in need of assisting Grace.

Both these objects the Gospel declares it to be its special purpose to obtain for us. How far it has redeemed its pledge, with regard to the former, must ever in this life be a mere matter of faith, building its conclusions upon what we conceive to be the certainty of the Divine promises, the reasonableness of the object, and our urgent need of it. But of the latter, if founded in truth, we ought to have experimental proof in this life; because the gifts of the Spirit, if real, ought to have a perceptible influence on our conduct, and to place a visible and plain mark of distinction between those whom Scripture designates as the children of this world, and those to whom it gives the appellation of children of light. Does, then, positive experience serve to confirm this undoubted doctrine of revelation? Do we find that our moral nature undergoes a change for the better, in proportion as we approximate by faith towards the terms of acceptance held forth to us by the Gospel covenant? If it does, then there ought to be a decided difference not merely between the external actions, but more especially in the whole cast of mind and of sentiment of the one party and the other. Such, undoubtedly, ought to be, and such, there can be little doubt, is actually the case. At the same time it must be conceded, that the question does not admit of that full clearness of proof of which it might at first sight be deemed capable. Natural morality, we must recollect, forms an integral portion of Christianity itself; but a man, we know, may admit the inferences and defer to the authority of the former, whilst he rejects the latter. He may, therefore, be capable of performing actions which even to the most enlightened Christian may appear externally good, and even with respect to their internal character may, in a certain sense,

be admitted to be such; that is to say, in such a degree at least as the inferior and defective motives from which they proceed may justify our applying to them that appellation. The purest Christian motives again (on which the character of our actions must totally depend) may not be, and in fact never are, always equally influential in the conduct of the same individual at all times; whilst, also, they may not always, even when most sincere, be accompanied by an unerring judgment, or that delicacy of tact which recommends our conduct to the approbation of society. The most sincere servant of Christ may be ignorant, timid, fearful, and superstitious; he may have to sustain internal struggles which can never reach the eye of the external observer, and which if laid open to the apprehension of others would only provoke a smile of pity or contempt. Most assuredly it is not for the gross perceptions of worldly men to judge how much of what is substantially estimable and heroic, in the best sense of the term, may be disguised in this homely and repulsive attire, and the due appreciation of which must be reserved for the equitable and infallible tribunal of omniscience. Certain, at all events, it is, that whilst outward appearances remain the same, or even whilst the scale of merit may sometimes appear to preponderate in favour of the less decidedly religious character, the view taken by our Maker, with whom the purity of the heart is all in all, and the glitter of the intellect as nothing, may be directly the reverse of the world's judgment.

Still, however, though the mingling shades of character, and the unequal distribution of those gifts which recommend man to society, may render it often difficult, and sometimes impossible for us to recognise the express workings of the Christian spirit, as distinguished from those of the natural and strictly human propensities, we may confidently appeal to the broad and palpable phenomena which distinguish the sincere followers of Christ from the mere men of this

world, that the difference between them is not
ginary, but permanent and real. The whole
value of human actions depending upon motives
it being the great practical object of Christiani
supersede almost all those of our original nature
to substitute in their room others of a higher char
it is obvious that the responsible being in whon
change is wrought must, so far as his relative po
with respect to his Maker is taken into consider
be, in almost the literal interpretation of the w
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persons whose standard of conduct is derived
from the perishable things of this life. The
objects, consequently, as contemplated by them
rally from different points of view, will appear t
and to them in extremely different proportions.
of them reasoning accurately from their respe
premises, will come to completely contrary co
sions, with respect to the intrinsic value and the
parative innocence of their several pursuits.
which to the coarse and hackneyed feelings o
worldly man appears a necessary part of his n
with which it is vain to struggle, and which he d
after all, as below the dignity of Almighty wi
to regard or to punish, is to the quick and susce
touch of the spiritually-minded a pollution whic
be purged away only by the most solemn expi
He recollects the fearful derangement which i
already occasioned in the works of Providence
the immense ransom which it has already cost;
whilst he feels his weakness and his contin
recurring propensity to it, as continually perse
to pray for support against it. His feelings, ac
ingly, when they occur, for occur occasionally
will, become, in a certain sense, rather in
ties than sins. He remembers that they wh
born of God commit no wilful sin whatever, a
a *hasty* display of petulance, a selfish or in

thought escape for a moment from him, the humiliation of his feelings and the increased energy with which he supplicates for a fresh portion of the Divine support, sufficiently vouch for the heavenward progress which he is making. It is easy, no doubt, to turn all these nice perceptions into ridicule, and to ask, even admitting their reality, of what advantage they are to ourselves or to society. To the mere utilitarian of this world, who conceives that the exclusive object of the stupendous scheme of the universe is the production of a few personal comforts, and who considers the soul as intended to cater for the body, and not the body as an instrument given to the soul for the exercise and developement of its noblest faculties, such an objection as the foregoing will appear decisive. But to the person whose mind is sufficiently enlarged to take in all the known and all the probable circumstances of our compound nature, such views will appear any thing rather than trifling or superstitious. It is true that human life, when considered under the most encouraging aspect, presents us only with the view of a hardly contested and half-earned victory over the principle of corruption; but, then, this very imperfect success is in itself, if rightly considered, a pledge afforded to us by Providence that the allotment of the Christian is not confined to what we see of him here. If those moral exertions, to which the internal voice of conscience most eloquently responds, are unproductive of any substantial fruit in this world, we can scarcely want a stronger proof that what is so evidently an essential part of our nature must be destined to find its due place and correspondent allotment in another. Scripture tells us that this life is a state of moral trial. It is quite impossible to imagine any combination of circumstances better calculated for the promotion of that end, if such be really its object. Were this world all in all, we might naturally expect of our Maker that the faculties with which we are endued should

be exactly adequate for the accomplishment of the work which it would then be our sole duty to perform. There would be a nicely balanced proportion observed between our appointed business and the machinery of our allotted powers. But a spiritual probation, such as that which the Gospel scheme supposes, in order to be complete for the accomplishment of the whole of its purpose, requires that we should be tasked *beyond* our strength, because without such a demand upon us the full and entire whole of what we can really achieve could never be called into action. But this excess of trial beyond our natural means of performance, almost presupposes, in the case of a merciful and just Ruler of the Universe, the existence of such external and occasional help as, whilst it would secure to us the full benefit of the moral exercise, would at the same time interfere at the proper season, and prevent that which is intended as a benefit from becoming an injury; precisely as a kind and intelligent parent, whilst he encourages his children to the full exercise of their strength, assists them at the moment when he sees that they really stand in need of his interference.

The foregoing view of the question, then, may be simply stated thus:—The acknowledged object of our existence in this world being that of a spiritual probation, and that probation being brought into full action by the imposition of a task far exceeding our natural powers of performance, the doctrines of justification and of sanctification, the former by an external expiation for sin, the latter by the communication of spiritual aid, to those who earnestly seek for it by prayer, for the completion of their appointed task, appear to be necessary inferences from that primary admission. God having, in his wisdom, endued us with very imperfect capabilities of obedience, calls us, notwithstanding, to regulate our lives by an *actually* perfect rule of duty. The utmost which we *can do is*, after all, to fall far short of the standard at

ch we aim; but we confidently believe, meanle, that the Divine arm is stretched out to assist lead us forward; and although the closing scene ur career is hid from our view, the inference ears certain, that what is thus wisely begun will s wisely ended. The same admitted imperfection ur nature exposes us not only to the negative ct of failure, but also, as is too obvious, to the tive one of occasional sin: here, again, the same ciful Providence interferes, and pays for us, under stipulation of an express covenant, which we are petent to accept or to decline, the price of those rations which, though referrible, in great mea-, to our own depravity, may, in a certain degree, ear to follow necessarily from the inherent corion of our minds. Now it is evident that this, if tly understood, is any thing rather than what it been asserted to be, an indolent system, encoung us to throw equally our moral exertions and responsibility of our sins upon our Maker. On contrary, as we cannot without the grossest iety, accede to the inference of the Antinomian, , on the plea of the infinite operation of Christ's ement, argues that he may now offend with unity, thus making the most stupendous proof of deadliness of sin an encouragement for its wed commission; so we shall be reasoning as ly and profanely, if we derive from the scriptural rine of cooperating grace the inference, that we r safely suspend our own efforts, and trust for the mplishment of our task to the predominating and sistible influence of the Divine Spirit. Here, ed, we tread upon the verge of a nice and interable point of theological metaphysics, which it is r to decline touching upon than to discuss. The stion respecting the liberty of human actions is a tical one, which we cannot mistake if we follow, he best of our power, the instinctive guidance of *holiest impulses*, however we may be perplexed

whilst viewing it as a philosophical problem. That the obvious purport of Scripture with reference to this mysterious topic, accords with our own internal consciousness, and, whether we really are, or are not, essentially free agents, at all events calls upon us to act as though we were such, cannot be doubted. In fact, the arguments generally alleged in support of the doctrine of necessity, though often advocated by sincerely pious and amiable men, are all of them liable to the same objections which, at an early period of these observations, we have stated to attach to the plausible but unsubstantial theories of infidelity; that is to say, they turn away our attention from what we know experimentally of the arrangements of Divine Providence, and rest their proofs upon *a priori* assumption only; a mode of discussion which, however plausible, it is scarcely necessary to remark, is almost always delusive and unsubstantial.

Without, then, attempting to enter upon the examination of the conflicting opinions respecting necessity and free-will, we will merely venture to observe, that if we will take into consideration the moral purpose, which, so far as we can judge from the general context of revelation, it is the object of the operation of Divine grace to accomplish upon the human heart, we cannot but suppose that the degree of spiritual aid which it affords will necessarily be such as would be compatible, in all respects, with the full liberty of human actions: in other words, it will be a cooperating and concurrent help, not a predominating and overpowering influence. We do not pretend to shut our eyes to the apparent force of the objections which may be alleged on the opposite side. It is, we know, confidently urged by the advocates of necessity, that, as it is derogatory to the admitted attributes of the Deity, that his interference with human actions should be supposed capable of being *resisted* by finite beings like ourselves, the admission *of the* reality of such interference is necessarily

destructive of the doctrine of man's free agency. Plausible as this objection is, if considered as an abstract proposition, we conceive that it stands in need of no other refutation than that of a practical appeal to every circumstance and phenomenon of the creation which surrounds us. The argument upon which it rests is, in fact, nothing more than an assumption of the principle that all the works of infinity are necessarily themselves infinite; a supposition which, if true, would be a virtual denial of the liberty of the Divine Being himself, as it is also obviously incompatible with the fact of the existence of the graduated scale of subordinate creatures, which we recognise in every direction, through the works of Providence. God, we know, has distributed their several faculties to the different races of animals precisely in the proportion in which they are wanted for their defence and support, subjecting each several gift to its peculiar modification, and withholding those which are unnecessary. Why, then, if the limitation of his own omnipotence is one of the most prominent phenomena which characterize his creation, must we necessarily assume that the gift of his assisting grace, the acknowledged object of which is to render man capable of effective righteousness, can, in fact, be imparted in such overwhelming proportions only as, by destroying that free agency which is the very basis of morality, would render all real righteousness impossible? It is absurd, we are told, to imagine that man can cooperate with his Maker in the production of any given purpose. We own that we do not see this absurdity, provided there is no implied impossibility in the idea that it may have been the will of our Creator to endow us with the faculty of free agency. It is true, indeed, that that very faculty itself must, under every view of the subject, be admitted to depend upon the Divine permission for its continuance; but this admission detracts *nothing* from the substantial reality of the

gift, when once communicated. To deny that the Almighty can annex liberty of will and action to his creatures, is in fact subjecting him to the same shackles of necessity which we are striving to impose upon ourselves; if, on the other hand, we admit that he can do so, the self-same inference which establishes the fact of his omnipotence and moral attributes is equally substantiative of our own relative dependence upon him as accountable beings. That the control of our actions is in some degree, at least, placed within our own power, our instinctive apprehensions and belief, with the otherwise inexplicable phenomena of an applauding or reproving conscience, we repeat, unite with the whole tenor of Scripture in uniformly asserting. To such cogency of proof on the one side, it would seem perfectly nugatory to oppose a mere metaphysical and equivocal axiom on the other; and yet it is on this single substratum that a system of theology has been erected, subversive, as at first sight it would appear, of almost all the great principles of Christianity, and which probably has failed of producing very extensive evil only from the fact that its advocates have frequently counteracted by the exemplary holiness of their lives the pernicious tendency of their doctrines. It is painful to speak in these terms of disparagement of the tenets of a large body of Christians whose mistakes, for such we believe them to be, are at all events frequently accompanied by so much warmth and rectitude of principle, and are the result of an exaggerated statement, the consequence of a deep conscientious impression, of a most momentous truth, rather than of any unworthy motive. As a system of belief, however, we cannot, and ought not, to conceal our opinion that it is not accordant with what we read in Scripture, and what our instinctive moral sense, that witness of God *within* our own hearts, would inculcate. At the *same time*, we readily admit, that if erroneous, it is

far less so than that opposite extreme which, by attempting to elevate unduly the moral faculties of man, would teach him to look for salvation to the merit of his own works, and to disclaim that reliance upon the Divine aid which can alone expiate our infirmities, and conduct us to effectual holiness.

CHAPTER XXI.

Of the practical Tendency of the Morality of the Gospel, and of the extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

If then the preceding remarks are correct, the Christian covenant is, of all the schemes of theology and ethics which have ever been laid open to the apprehension of mankind, that which tends to elevate our nature the most, and to promote most largely a course of pure and energetic action in its followers, whilst at the same time, by a singularly uniform and pervading analogy, it harmonizes with all that the best human philosophy can infer respecting the presumed arrangements of Providence. By the substitution of a vicarious atonement for sin, it may seem calculated at the first glance to encourage laxity of morals, and by the necessity of external spiritual aid which it asserts, it may appear to have a tendency to paralyze our own personal efforts, but, in proportion as we examine it more and more nearly, these objections not only entirely disappear, but its real practical tendency appears to be directly the reverse of what we might have hastily supposed. Whilst referring all things to the free grace, and mercy, and purity of God, it promotes, to a degree perfectly unexampled under any other modification of belief, holiness of heart and action in men. Fervent, practical righteousness; righteousness which in its reverential service of our Maker is perfectly analogous with those feelings of kindliness required of us toward our neigh-

bour; righteousness which, from a deep conviction of humility and gratitude, looks firmly and cheerfully and submissively to the protection of a wise and bounteous Providence, hoping all things, enduring all things, and believing all things, is its great aim and object. When that object is obtained (and completely obtained it is not until the great twin doctrines of justification and sanctification, as revealed by Scripture, have become part and parcel of our habitual impressions and given a decided character to our minds,) human nature may be truly said to have arrived at the highest possible moral elevation of which in this world it is capable. The refinements of science may add much to its external appearance in the intercourse of society, as they may add also to the utility and individual comfort of their respective possessors. But on these points God, we are assured, sees not as man sees. Such accessory qualities are after all, where the main tendency of the mind is right, rather a superaddition of incidental worldly advantage than indispensable constituents of that class of blessings which it is our primary duty to aspire to. The first appeal of Christianity is to our spiritual and moral feelings, because in proportion as these are duly cultivated the faculties of the understanding acquire their relative degree of usefulness. This subjection of merely intellectual to moral excellence, which is so offensive to the vanity of men of this world as to account for no small degree of the petulance with which they regard revelation, is traceable from first to last through the whole tenor of Scripture. That it indeed in right reason ought to be so, is sufficiently obvious; nor should we have deemed it necessary to make the remark in this place, did it not serve to account for what at first sight seems paradoxical in some portions of the sacred writings, with reference to the preternatural gifts of the Holy Spirit alluded to in the books both of the Old and of the New Testament.

We are so apt to be struck with the splendour, and consequent appearance of partial favour in the sight of God, attaching to the miraculous powers of prophecy and language distributed to individuals on peculiar and remarkable occasions, that we feel disposed to undervalue as inferior in importance those graces which, as instruments of salvation, are essential, and have, therefore, been made accessible to the whole Christian world. Hence it is that in every period of religious agitation since the first diffusion of Christianity, individuals have been found who, whether excited by fanaticism, vanity, or other less objectionable motives, but, assuredly, in contradiction to the prudential maxim quoted by our blessed Saviour himself, that we should abstain from "tempting the Lord our God," have laid claim to these extraordinary gifts, forgetting that, after all, the entire submission of the will, with which we defer to the providential arrangements of our Divine Master, is the best proof as well of our favour with him as of the rectitude of our own hearts. It is a salutary lesson, accordingly, which seems purposely to have been given to us by Providence in order to correct this prevailing misapprehension, that what we usually styled the extraordinary operations of the Spirit appear to have been occasionally conferred under both the old and new dispensations upon persons whose moral qualifications have been sometimes more than questionable. Thus, in the Old Testament we read of the profligate and mercenary Balaam, the reprobate Saul, and the vacillating and apparently worldly-minded messenger of God's wrath against the altar of Bethel, as severally endowed with the gift of prophecy: and in the New Testament, to look no further than the case of the litigious members of the Corinthian Church addressed by St. Paul, we find there the instance of a far from exemplary set of members of the Christian community exercising *the miraculous* faculty of languages, which they

seem undoubtedly to have possessed, for no better purpose than that of personal ostentation and mutual rivalry. It is clear from what we read of the nature of these gifts, from the comparatively short period in which they were allowed to continue, and their complete cessation in the later ages, that they had nothing to do with the essential qualifications of the Christian character, but were intended solely as instruments for affixing the sanction of Divine authority to the doctrines then inculcated, or for the production of some other specific occasional purpose. Such, accordingly, is St. Paul's judgment respecting them. "Tongues," he observes, "are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." They were, therefore, with the other miraculous powers, well adapted for the peculiar condition of an infant Church, which had by its own intrinsic energy to break its way through the strong resistance of prejudice and existing institutions. But, assuredly, they are not suited for the general well-being of human nature under other less critical circumstances. As marks of God's peculiar favour to this or that person, it is evident that they could not long be enjoyed without producing a demoralizing effect upon the character of their possessor by the spiritual vanity which they are so obviously calculated to promote. Consequently, in every instance in which we read of them, they appear never to have been capable of being exercised in any uniform or permanent degree; never, in fact, in such a proportion as to place the parties enjoying them, not even the foremost and holiest men under both dispensations, above the pressure of incidental calamity, or the operation of natural causes. That they did really exist under both the early Jewish and the early Christian covenants is most certain, not only from the contemporary and unanswerable records which have *been* transmitted to our times, but also from the *lingering* belief in the continued possession of these

gifts which, as we learn from the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, prevailed even in their days, and which disappeared only after a long negative experience had taught mankind no longer to calculate upon such special interpositions. The circumstance of their having been thus withdrawn is of itself sufficient to convince us that we have no reason to regret their loss. As gratuitous marks of God's special favour and acceptance of persons, they would be pernicious to the receiver, and contradictory to the impartial tenor of the Gospel covenant; even as proofs of the truth of the doctrines for which they vouch, they would in our times be inefficacious, since at a period when no really new communication of the Divine Will can be or ought to be expected, the fact of their being laid claim to by this or that individual would more naturally justify a suspicion of fanaticism or imposture on his part, than of his real and authoritative mission. That man was not intended for the exercise of powers of this intoxicating quality is evident from the fact that the possession of it has, since the period of the apostolical age, been asserted, for occasional and obviously inferior purposes, only by persons of very excitable minds, or the professed leaders of a party, whilst they have been disclaimed successively by those foremost lights and luminaries, the unassuming sanctity of whose lives has reflected the purest splendour upon the records of the Christian Church. We can, in fact, imagine no possible gifts of Providence which would operate so fatally as that now alluded to, upon that humble and confiding faith which is the best possession of a Christian whilst on earth: that faith which "sees not, and yet has believed:" which hopes almost against hope, and remains unshaken in its firm reliance upon the mercies of the Almighty, under the infliction of the heaviest personal calamities, or the most overwhelming causes of mental depression. and which, amid the immoveable uni-

formity of the works of nature and the seduction of physical causes, can still fix its eye upon those remote but imperishable truths, the real value of which those only can duly appreciate, who by the blessed aid of the Divine Spirit, have overcome the world.

CHAPTER XXII.

Recapitulation of some of the foregoing Observations—The scriptural Doctrine of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit.

THE doctrines of Christianity, then, differ from the conclusions of mere natural religion in its best and purest form, in the fact that they occupy a more extensive range in their explanation of the mysteries of God's moral government than can be attempted by our unassisted reason; and that whilst the latter is obliged to stop short in the midst of its inquiries, in consequence of the accumulating perplexities and seeming anomalies which crowd in upon it from every quarter, the former, by the adoption of the two great collateral truths of the atonement and of assisting grace, is enabled to advance a step further, and to reconcile, so far as to our limited understanding such high topics can be reconciled, the strange phenomena of human nature with the unsullied attributes of the Almighty. That these two momentous positions are not gratuitous and superstitious superadditions to the religion of nature, but, on the contrary, that the exclusion of them would render every reasonable view of religion incomplete, because irrelevant to our acknowledged spiritual wants, must, we conceive, be evident to all those who will take the trouble of considering this intricate question in all its bearings. It is true, indeed that the force of the *conclusion* will be felt only by such persons as have

impartially explored their way, step by step, through the several stages of previous inquiry. To a mere careless observer, we readily admit that pure and unmixed Deism may, at first glance appear quite sufficient to answer all the purposes which a large portion of even the educated classes of mankind are disposed to require from their religion. But still it is only the careless observer who will be thus satisfied, because he alone is ignorant of the inexplicable difficulties which surround natural religion, considered as a complete system in itself, and when unaided by revelation. It is impossible to take a comprehensive view around us, without coming to the conviction that an arrangement, far more complex than the simple principles afforded by the light of nature, is absolutely necessary for meeting all the consequences which such an inquiry suggests. It is accordingly, on this account, we conceive, that probably not one single instance can be quoted of a really painstaking inquirer into the truths of Christianity having closed his studies with a mind unconvinced by the force of the evidence on which they rest. The further men proceed in such an investigation, the more are they struck by the discovery of coincidences, which completely escape the notice of the less attentive observer. As they trace, link by link, the chain of inferences, one fact leads to, and implies the existence of, another; the detection of an inveterate moral disease within themselves, of which they were not previously aware, necessarily suggests a solicitude after its cure; and thus the inefficacy of the simple expedients which they once deemed sufficient for the purpose becomes more palpably evident, in proportion as they are more deeply impressed with a conviction of their danger. Human reason, accordingly, as she advances with conscience for her guide, through the lengthening series of connected consequences, gradually approximates to, *though undoubtedly* she could never originally

discover, by her own light, those very results which revelation so broadly announces. She travels in the right direction, but the barrier which interrupts her course, and obstructs her view forward to more remote truths, is removeable by inspiration only. It is true that new and unforseen difficulties continue to present themselves during the entire course of her progress, but as a compensation, those more early ones, which originally appeared to her as perfectly insuperable, satisfactorily adjust themselves, and by the new position which they occupy, cease, as formerly, to startle by their seeming anomaly. It is, however, as has been already remarked, the necessary character of all experimental induction, to remove one source of embarrassment only by the substitution of another, leaving always a residue of mystery as perplexing to our apprehension as that which first stimulated our inquiry. And this must more particularly be the case in theological pursuits than in any other branch of science. The real proof that we have made an actual progress is, not that no difficulty lies before us, but that those which we have already passed are thus far explained, and, being explained, cohere, by a natural accordance, the one with the other. Thus it is in the instance now under discussion. Nothing, surely, can be more satisfactory, as a practical vindication of the mercy and wisdom of our Maker, in placing us in our present singular position in this life, than the certainty of the great truths connected with the process of our redemption. So completely do they appear to solve the most prominent enigmas which present themselves at the very threshold of inquiry, and to ratify the most reasonable postulates of natural religion, that they may be said to carry their own proofs along with them. Still, however, we must recollect, that we have no right or authority to avail ourselves retrospectively of the solution afforded to the difficulties of natural theology by the revealed

facts of Scripture, and to decline, at the same time, to admit prospectively the legitimate inferences from those facts, be their character what they may. It is the besetting error of all loose reasoners and half-formed believers in the doctrines of Christianity, to forget that the system of revelation is a consistent and entire whole, and must be accepted by us as such. We make this remark on the present occasion for the purpose of observing, that if we once admit the dogmas of justification and sanctification as the two fundamental positions of the Gospel covenant we are bound not to stop at this point, but to advance forward to the strictly inferential but less obvious truths inseparably connected with them. Thus the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, as has been already shown, would appear to follow from the conclusions of reason alone, independently of what we find directly asserted by Scripture to the same effect, if we assent to that of his infinite atonement for sin. In like manner the concurrent doctrine of assisting grace would lead us, by analogy, to the same inference respecting the divine and personal nature of the Holy Spirit, even were revelation silent on that subject: we cannot, therefore, be surprised upon finding the express language of the inspired writings conveying the same impression. It is true, indeed, that we cannot, without gross presumption, assert that these two inferences might actually have been arrived at by the natural powers of the understanding tracing the succession of connected consequences: all we mean to argue, therefore, is, that when revelation has once announced them as facts, we can see retrospectively sufficient grounds for admitting them as intrinsically probable. Thus far only we conceive that any reasoning from internal probability can be legitimately carried. On these high and transcendental questions all *à priori* arguments, whether affirmative or negative, are obviously irrelevant, unless made strictly

subservient to the written declarations of the inspired word of God. Points which are confessedly above the reach of human reason, we should recollect, not only may not, but in strictness *cannot* be contrary to it. We possess no standard within our own minds by which to measure their truth or falsehood, and therefore as it is impossible, by mere argument, to prove their accordance with probability, it is equally so to demonstrate their discordance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Of the Holy Trinity.

If, however, we admit that the personality and divinity both of the Redeemer and of the Sanctifier of mankind are positively asserted by Scripture, and admit it we must, unless we would shut our eyes to the general tendency of revelation, and the obvious purport of common language, then the great Christian doctrine of the Trinity would appear to follow, not so much in the form of an inferential consequence derivable from those premises, as in that of an identical proposition. So far from being an excrescence unnecessarily superadded, by human invention, to the more simple scheme of Christianity, and equally repugnant, as has been alleged, to sound reason and the declarations of Holy Writ, this final and momentous truth appears, so far as we may, with all due humility, venture to surmise, to suggest nothing at all repugnant with the former, and to be explicitly established by the latter. It stands, in fact, as the crowning point in which all the converging parts of God's revealed arrangements would seem to terminate, and which once removed, would cause the beautiful symmetry of that dispensation which Providence *had been*, for the space of four thousand years, foster-

ing and maturing, until the period of its final promulgation, to fall of itself piece-meal into a mass of unconnected propositions and of intricate contrivances, deprived of any definite end or object. The slightest glance at the heads of the foregoing arguments will show that this assertion is not lightly or hastily made. It is, we repeat, evidently impossible to deny the truth of the Trinitarian doctrine, and to retain those of the atonement, and of sanctifying grace, as part and parcel of Christianity, because the admission of the two latter, by an obvious implication, involves the certainty of the former. Again, we cannot omit those two last-mentioned doctrines from our system of faith, without at once reducing the whole Gospel dispensation to a mere code of morals, not only ineffectual as a practical instrument of righteousness, but actually adding an accession of weight to our already overcharged load of responsibility. We cannot again take this very humble view of the character of the great final consummation of our Maker's direct intercourse with mankind, without perceiving how very unlike it is, if true, in point of simplicity and contrivance to all the other acknowledged operations of Divine wisdom. If such a theory as that of the Unitarian be correct, then it is quite impossible to reconcile with what we know of the workings of the Almighty mind from the phenomena of the material universe, the very elaborate and intricate series of miracles and predictions which form the subject matter of the Old Testament, and the deviations from the ordinary course of nature which marked the promulgation of the new covenant. The whole system of revelation would, in that case, appear to be a tissue of wonders without an adequate, we might almost say without any, object. In the material creation it is never, so far as the researches of philosophy extend, the apparently efficient cause, but the resulting effects which are diversified and intricate. From one single and often apparently

trifling fact, that, for instance, of the obliquity of the earth's axis, the all-wise Contriver knows how to elicit the most important and multifarious consequences, which branch out in every possible direction to the production of beauty and usefulness. Is there, then, any unsoundness in the argument which infers unity of design in all the works of an all-wise Author? Is it reasonable to suppose that the arrangements of the self-same all-comprehending mind would be found to be at variance with one another? That in one, the least valuable, portion of the universe, causes should be simple, and effects intricate; in the other and most important, that causes should be intricate and effects simple? The opposite assumption would surely seem the most probable. Such, however, would be the conclusion to which Unitarianism would lead us. If, then, the course of God's spiritual provision for our eternal welfare has been marked, as it assuredly has been, with a superabundant proportion of preparatory contrivance, the inference, from analogy, appears obvious, that the result will be found to be in momentous importance proportionate to the beginning; and that a system, the foundation of which has been laid in an almost unbroken continuity of miracles, cannot finally terminate in what might have been accomplished by human means, without the aid of miracle, namely, the inculcation of a mere code of ethical philosophy, however, in itself, admirable and perfect. Nothing, surely, according to this view of the subject, can appear more irrational than what is called rational religion. To those who deny, altogether, the inspiration of Scripture, Unitarianism, aided, as it still might be, by the splendid morality of the Bible, is undoubtedly capable of affording a plausible, though unsubstantial, rule of life which, as calculated to please the eye and amuse the ear, and to supply the tongue with well-sounding maxims, may pass for real religion with the careless and lan*guid votary* of this world. But it is a perfect contra-

diction to advance one step further than this point, and, admitting the infallibility of the sacred writings, to attempt to explain away their most unequivocal declarations, solely because our natural understanding cannot keep pace with the wonders which they develope. Revelation professes to lead us beyond the barrier which marks the confines of human knowledge, and to place, as it were, the very throne and effulgence of the Divine Being almost within our view. Is this the point, at the very moment when human reason fails us, and when every scale and standard of measurement by which we may judge of the internal truth or falsehood of a proposition becomes inapplicable, where we ought to stop and discuss how much of those hallowed oracles we shall receive, and how much reject? On questions like these the entire submission of the understanding is assuredly the mark of a strong and not of an infirm mind. The anti-Trinitarian asserts the competency of human reason to pronounce judgment upon even all the transcendental topics which form the subject-matter of revelation, and argues that no proposition which involves a positive contradiction of terms can possibly be true. The obvious answer to this argument is that of inquiring, how he knows that the Trinitarian doctrine does involve the contradiction which he supposes. We know, experimentally, that were our acquaintance with the points of secular science less than it is, we should, without hesitation, pronounce many things to be incompatible and contradictory the one to the other which are found to be really congruous and coexistent. General assertions are easily got up, and always carry with them an imposing and philosophical air. But a large proportion of the real order of nature is made up of exceptions to such general and comprehensive rules. Thus we often hear it urged, that the acknowledged unity of the Divine nature is manifestly irreconcilable with the Trinitarian doctrine; individuality of person and of

consciousness being capable, as it is alleged, under no possible circumstances, of attaching to a Being possessed of a complex mode of existence. The objection, undoubtedly, at first sight, appears forcible. And yet we reply, let the objector, before he proceeds to reason confidently upon the universality of his rule, refer to the fact of his own complex constitution as an illustration of it. Man himself, we assert, is in this respect a case in point. Compounded of body and soul, of two substances, which we have the strongest reason for considering as essentially distinct in all their characteristics the one from the other, he still is actually and experimentally one single individual in the strictest meaning of the term. If, then, we are met by so startling an exception to this seeming general maxim at the very outset of our inquiry, surely we can hope little from the guidance of mere reason in the investigation of higher mysteries, where any thing like experimental induction is manifestly out of the question. And yet, strange it is to say, that upon this single assumption, rendered untenable, as it would seem to be, by the most familiar fact, and so completely inapplicable when resorted to as a principle by which to judge of the nature of the incomprehensible Creator of the universe, the hypothesis of Christian Unitarianism rests almost entirely for its support, sacrificing to an equivocal *à priori* dictum the whole consistency of the theory, and the most direct assertions of the letter of revelation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

On the practical tendency of the Christian virtue of "Faith."

We have now, then, taken a general and enlarged, though a hasty, view of the entire scheme of God's interposition for the salvation of mankind, as communicated to us in the books of the old and new covenants, and we have remarked one uniform idea pervading the whole, which, though developed piecemeal, and at many distinct periods, clearly announces the superintending direction of an Almighty Contriver. The great scope and object of the whole appears to be the reconciling of the free agency and moral training of the human soul with the abstract principles of eternal justice and mercy, by a special arrangement well calculated in this world to call into action the highest quality of spiritual holiness of which our present nature is capable, and in a future state of existence to avert the otherwise inevitable consequences of sin, and to purchase for those, who sincerely conform to the conditions required of them, an eternal allotment of inconceivable felicity. In making this survey, one remarkable circumstance has not failed to strike us; namely, how great a demand is made upon our moral powers of obedience and self-restraint, by a system which, from the external aids both of sanctification and of expiation, which it pledges itself to afford, would appear above all other modes of religion calculated to encourage personal indolence. This is one of the most singular features of revelation, and strongly illustrates the wisdom with which it has been contrived; namely, that its practical operation is invariably found to steer clear of those defects to which, when viewed as a mere theory, it would seem obvi-

ously to lead. No doctrine appears at first sight more likely to suspend the exertion of every active power within us than that which inculcates that all our best endeavours are the special gift of an external agency, and that our only hopes of external salvation rest not upon our own personal merits, but upon a vicarious expiation wrought for us, without any effective assistance on our part. That such an hypothesis would tend in its operation to depress rather than to elevate the human character, seems, we confess, a natural and almost inevitable inference; and that such actually is its tendency has been not unfrequently asserted by its enemies. And yet we find, experimentally, that nothing can be more remote from the truth than such a conclusion. We have reverted to these remarks, which have already been advanced on a former occasion, for the sake of the illustration they afford with respect to the value and character of the one great and prominent Christian virtue—faith. The instrument by which alone we are assured that we can lay hold of the benefits proffered to our acceptance by the Gospel Covenant is this quality of faith; and, in order that we may lie under no misapprehension with respect to the full meaning of the term, we find it repeatedly described by Scripture as being not merely an implicit belief in the fact of Christ's mission, but also a reposing confidence upon his atonement for sin, and an absolute denial and renunciation of any merit whatever as attaching to our own actions. At the same time, it is an undeniable truth, that the self-same Scriptures, which appear thus to detract from the merit of good works, are most peremptory and uncompromising in the tone in which they demand them at our hands. Here is every appearance of a direct contradiction; and yet it is only one of those seeming contradictions which, as if for the purpose of humiliating human reason, are scattered, from time to time, *through* the inspired volume, but which, practically,

are found to be replete with profound wisdom. If accordingly we will take a retrospective glance at human history, and ask what single quality and affection of the mind of man has achieved more acts of real heroism, has more perseveringly compassed sea and land in quest of works of charity, has more uniformly subdued the natural arrogance of the heart in the full tide of temporal prosperity, or armed it with the most exemplary and cheerful patience under the severest inflictions of adversity, we shall boldly answer, faith. There is, in fact, no imaginable state of mind, no circumstance or condition of life, to which this foremost Christian principle is not calculated to extend a beneficial influence. Faith is the appointed means by which we are enabled to avail ourselves of the benefits intended to be conveyed to mankind by the death of Christ; and it is so for this substantial reason, because it is the principle by the adoption of which we can alone render ourselves like unto him by the holiness and purity of our lives, by the unaffected humility of our obedience, and by the sublimity of our spiritual aspirations. Faith, far more than any other spiritual operation with which we are acquainted, extinguishes within us the corrupt appetites of the flesh by approximating us to, and almost indentifying us with, our great Exemplar and Pattern. To have faith in Christ, in the full Scriptural sense, is obviously, not merely to believe that he is, or that he came into the world, and continued in it for a definite period; but it is the belief that he came to save sinners, when no less a sacrifice could avert from them the Divine wrath; it is our conviction of the extreme deadliness and abomination of sin which could render so vast an expiation necessary, with the consequent inference of the obligation of aiming at the highest stage of holiness to which our imperfect nature can attain, and of cultivating the deepest sentiments of gratitude to God, of distrust of ourselves, and of charity towards our fellow-creatures,

who, having been involved in one common con
nation, are now, together with us, candidate
our Maker's unearned and gratuitous mercy.
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feeling now described can deserve to be desig
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pay the forfeiture of sin in his own person
intend, by so doing, to sanction, and even encou
the renewed commission of it; that it is seeml
even possible, to know that we have received s
a benefit, and yet not to love the Benefactor;
loving him with all befitting fervour, we could
berately wish to disobey his commands, and
teract his holy purposes, or that such fervour of
can be consistent with limited and desultory e
after righteousness, with cruelty, selfishness, ar
solence towards others, or with an undue prefe
of temporal to spiritual objects, are all of
manifest contradictions. "If ye love me," say
blessed Saviour, "keep my commandments."
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and regeneration of the character which is th
proof of the accompanying grace of God's
Spirit, and which the Apostle so well describes
he figuratively compares it to being dead with
unto sin, and raised again with him to a life o
ritual holiness; and with reference to which
state he asserts, that he who is of Christ sins n

Would men have early learned to distinguis
tween the very dissimilar ideas conveyed by the

merated, the false assumptions which have prevailed on both sides of this important question could never have thrown the stigma upon Christianity which, unfortunately, they have done. But the fact is, that nothing is so difficult in religious discussion as to keep the middle road. The holiest truths ever lie in close contact with the most pernicious falsehoods, and it often requires no small nicety of moral discernment to distinguish between them. Exaggerated statements, and the predilection for one part of a system, at the expense, and to the neglect of all the rest, are the bane of Christianity, as they have been the grand impediments in the way of man's advancement in all wholesome science whatever. It is the rectitude of the heart which can alone direct the understanding safely amid the many conflicting theories resulting from false ingenuity and partial views of the spirit of revelation: and that rectitude can be duly maintained only by keeping the devotional feelings warm, and our carnal imaginations cool and collected; by enlarged and cheering views of the arrangements of that great Being who, we are assured, would not that any, the least of his creatures, should perish, accompanied with the most unfeigned humility with regard to our own personal merits; and by a deep conviction, on the other hand, that not even the plentiude of Divine mercy itself can release us from that duty of purity and holiness which, even were all future retribution out of the question, would necessarily attach to us as moral and intellectual beings.

CHAPTER XXV.

Of Ecclesiastical Authority and Ordinances.

In the foregoing remarks we have attempted to trace the gradual growth and developement of the great scheme of revelation from its first imperfect commencement, as adapted to the wants of a comparatively low grade of society, to that later period when it at length shone forth in full splendour, and, by its overpowering brilliancy, extinguished, as it were, all the weaker lights of human ethics, which the researches of the wisest men of antiquity had set up for the guidance of mankind. We have also endeavoured to show that, perplexing as some of the facts which it announces may be to our reason, and even startling as some of its doctrines may at first sight appear to our moral feelings, the practical operation of that revelation upon the human character is what we cannot possibly appreciate too highly; and that, under its auspicious influence, the soul of man is capable, even in this world, of attaining to a moral growth and elevation of which those who derive their notions from other modifications of belief cannot form the slightest idea. Such then, we repeat, is Christianity in its essentials, both with respect to faith and practice; and such, had human nature been disposed, of its own accord, to choose the good and refuse the evil, would it probably been left to us by Providence in all its intrinsic simplicity, without those accompanying enactments and institutions which, in strictness, are to be viewed rather as necessary defensive accessories than as part and parcel of its original structure. Such, however, unfortunately, is the perversity of our passions, that almost as much elaborate contrivance is necessary to enable us to enjoy the

best gifts of Providence, without abusing or diverting them from their original purpose, as to purchase the original possession of them. It is not enough that God has filled this world with almost inexhaustible blessings, but it is also necessary that coercive human laws should regulate the mode of their fruition, should restrain fraud and rapine, and prevent our perverting them to our own injury, and to that of society in general. So is it also with the important concerns of religion. Were no mistaken views, the results of carnal passion, likely to bias our opinions; did no hebetude of judgment continually interpose itself to prevent our taking in the entire conception and the exact proportions of the respective articles of our faith; were there no such a thing as a captious ingenuity, which loves to overstate antagonist portions of docrine, and no selfishness which shrinks from the practice of every self-denying duty, then, indeed, the beautiful system of Christian morals might have stood unsupported by any external aid, and have been left to the awakened good feelings of mankind to attract their admiration and improve their practice. But these visionary dreams of perfection have nothing to do with the present very humble circumstances of our nature. The pure essentials of religion can be no more maintained under the existing constitution of this world without the aid of discipline and an established ritual, than the political welfare of society can remain flourishing without the awe and deference attaching to the authority of the magistrate. We are perfectly conscious of the delicacy of the ground on which we are now treading. It is, we admit, an obvious truth that no restraints upon our presumed natural liberty can be designated as really good in themselves, but only inasmuch as they enable us to enjoy blessings which would be otherwise inaccessible. We admit, also, the encroaching nature of all human judgment when interfering with the questions of religion, and the necessity of

maintaining a jealous caution that the word of God shall not be rendered of none effect by becoming intermingled with the traditions of man. But it is certain, on the other hand, that even were the word of God silent on this important question, the whole history of the last eighteen centuries would show that pure and unadulterated Christianity can really flourish only where the waywardness and self-will of individual caprice is subjected to the restraints of wholesome and enlightened authority. It is not indeed necessary, and it is far from our wish on this occasion, to dwell in any length upon the very delicate and much contested point respecting any peculiar forms of ecclesiastical government, how far and under what modification such systems existed in the primitive Church, and may be considered as imperative upon the consciences of succeeding generations. In a dissertation, the express object of which is to promote unity of spiritual faith among all denominations of Christians, by pointing out the remarkable coherence of the respective parts of revelation one with the other, and their concurrence in promoting one grand and ultimate design, it cannot be expedient to excite the feelings of party jealousy by speaking invidiously on less essential topics, upon which we may charitably presume that an erroneous opinion may be maintained without a forfeiture of the fundamentals of sound belief. Respecting, therefore, and admiring as we do that form of discipline more especially recognised in this country, which we certainly conceive to approach as nearly to the apostolical model as the altered circumstances of mankind will admit, we shall still content ourselves with merely observing that even the most ardent champion of Christian liberty must confess, if he reason fairly, that a respectful deference to that system of authoritative restraint, be it what it will, which is found practically necessary for the discouragement of here*tical inno*vation, is as strictly a point of conscientious

obligation as any other case of obedience to the Divine Will. "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." Spiritual as the character of Christian worship is, and encouraging, as it undoubtedly does, the most direct intercourse between the human supplicant and the great object of his adoration, it is quite evident that so long as it is intended for the benefit of mankind it will require to be fenced round with those precautionary outworks against the encroachments of fanaticism, superstition, and unauthorized human interpretation, which if allowed full liberty of action would shortly destroy its very essence. It is in vain that we deprecate the existence of ecclesiastical authority so far as its functions are soberly exercised in promoting the solemnity, decency, and evangelical purity of public worship, if the waywardness of human passion be such as to render that authority imperatively necessary. Our Blessed Saviour, himself, by the institution of the two external rites of baptism and the Eucharist, and by the solemn delegation of the ministerial functions to his chosen apostles, clearly demonstrated that it was not the object of the Gospel dispensation to supersede entirely the use of ritual observances, or the exercise of wholesome interference when called for by the waywardness of licentious opinion. In the 13th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, also, we find the rite of ministerial ordination by the imposition of hands sanctioned by immediate inspiration. "As they (the members of the Church of Antioch) ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them.' And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away: So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed," &c. What proposition, it might have been confidently asked, is more palpably self-evident, than that the choice of the Holy Spirit would be a sufficient authority and qualifica-

tion for its ministers, without the intervention of human agency? Yet here that very Spirit is described as requiring that the communication of its gifts should be ratified by the delegation of the visible Church. Again, we read in the same portion of Sacred History that the assembled Church of Jerusalem thought fit to resolve, authoritatively, the then much agitated question respecting the expediency of circumcision, and to issue at the same time other rules for the spiritual direction of the new converts; and we learn also from the Apostolical Epistles that the various Churches scattered over Greece and Asia were severally placed under the guidance of their respective Governors, who possessed and exercised power for the ordination of well qualified teachers, and the excommunication of the corrupters of the true doctrine. The doubt, therefore, if any, respecting Church authority is clearly not one of fact, for that is admitted by all parties, but of degree only. But the discussion and settlement of that precise degree which shall be neither more nor less than what expediency requires, is one of the most difficult problems which the practical study of theology suggests. Certain, however, it is that the line of demarcation which separates the strict essentials of Christian faith from those accessory rules and institutions which form its outworks, and were intended solely for its protection, from external injury, should never be lost sight of by those who are anxious to imbibe the unadulterated spirit of Christianity. Without a jealous vigilance against the possible substitution of the dicta of human judgment in the place of the inspired and authoritative oracles of God, we know from experience that the introduction into the Church of superstitious formalities and of spiritual usurpation is inevitable. But we know, also, on the other hand, that nothing is more certain, than that if by advocating what is called Christian liberty it is intended to *introduce* a complete emancipation from all right of

dictation to the ignorant, or of censure and remonstrance to the fantastic perverters of Gospel truth, human selfishness and presumption, should the attempt be successful, would soon effectually blot out all the distinctive characteristics of the religion of Christ, and the inspired book of Scripture would be made to mean every thing or nothing according as it might chance to fall into the hand of this or that self-constituted teacher.

These observations are introduced in this place merely to show, that if at this late period of the world, after eighteen centuries of discussion, too often carried on under feelings of morbid excitement, the character of our religion has become apparently less simple than it was in the primitive ages of the Church, and if theology has become in the course of that time more of a science, and, therefore, as it might seem, less the exclusive creature of our moral apprehensions, the fault is one which it is much more easy to lament than to correct. Heresies are seldom, if ever, wilful perversions of Divine truth gratuitously introduced, but are almost always the result of over-sanguine tempers or contracted understandings partially culling and selecting favourite passages from the general context of revelation, according to the peculiar tastes and prejudices of the disputant. And the misfortune is, that the remedy adopted by the opposing party has too often been of the same nature with the original grievance. By inclining too strongly to the side most removed from the principles which they have attempted to refute, the assailants of heresy have themselves become heretical, and by deviating from the narrow central line have fallen into errors not less contrary to the tenor of revelation than those of their adversaries. It is thus that the progress of mankind, in the department of theology, has been for the most part a series of oscillations betwixt extreme opinions, rather than a cautious process of *induction* founded upon comprehensive views of the

whole system of revelation. The consequence, accordingly, has been, that the simple and beautiful scheme, which might originally have been brought home to the breast of the most ignorant and illiterate, when inculcating, exclusively, the two great fundamental truths of justification and sanctification, has, from an inevitable necessity, become fenced round with its peculiar technical phraseology and precise definitions: and in proportion as experience has shown how numerous are the passages to error, the necessity of superintendence, not so much, indeed, for the purpose of coercive control, as of friendly admonition, has become daily more and more manifest. It is on this account that the continual recurrence to the first principles of Gospel truth, abstracted from their incidental accompaniments, has become in later times of increasing importance to the Christian student. The complexity of character which attaches to the modern science of theology can, as has been already remarked, be effectually diminished only by a due care in discriminating between the essentials of religion as points of doctrine, and those accessories which, however sanctioned by divine authority, are are after all to be considered solely as defensive superadditions.

The apostolical rule on the subject of minor differences in ecclesiastical opinions is a wise and salutary one; that we should keep the devotional feeling of the heart right, and the judgment of the understanding will, under the Divine blessing, follow in the right direction. "Let us, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." Attend mainly to the great and essential propositions, and all the minor inferences will, of their own accord, fall into their proper place, and present themselves to our view in their just proportions. The simplicity of the primitive age, indeed, can be no more maintained in this advanced period of the world, than the artless

sentiments of boyhood can be retained in the business-like maturity of life. But integrity of intention may still enable us, to the last, to unite the harmlessness of the dove to the wisdom of the serpent. Even now, notwithstanding the necessary complexity of our knowledge, our faith may be as pure as that of the early Christians, provided only that our devotional feelings are as earnest as theirs: nor need the many safeguards which legislative wisdom, having God's oracles for its guide, has, from time to time, established for the encouragement of the sound doctrine, prove a greater cause of offence to the fervent believer in revelation, than are the wholesome restraints of secular law to those who voluntarily measure their conduct by those great rules of morality, the practice of which it is the object of the legislator and of the magistrate to enforce.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Of the Miracles recorded in the New Testament.

The object of the present dissertation being to remark upon the singular consistency of design and contrivance which marks the whole system of revelation, from first to last, it will be necessary, in order to make our survey complete, that we should take otice of that series of preternatural events which accompanied the final promulgation of Christianity. On the supposition that the covenant of the Gospel is a continuation and the final completion of that system of special providential interference which the books of the Old Testament assert to have been in operation from the very commencement of the world, it might naturally be expected that its Almighty Contriver should signalize this momentous consummation of *his mysterious* purpose by some display of his

favour, not less striking than those attending on his earlier and less perfect dispensations. This circumstance, in fact, would be nothing more than maintaining that uniformity of general character which is always found to pervade the different works of the same author. Now, not only do the books of the New Testament assert that such a course of miracles as might, from analogy, have been presumed upon, did actually take place on that latter occasion, but we may observe also, that the actual miracles recorded, whilst they bear testimony to the reality of the Mosaic dispensation, are distinguished from the earlier ones by a peculiar character of beneficence which exactly accords with the more merciful purport of that purer law which they were intended to confirm. The whole design of the institutions of Moses was confessedly of a harsher description than that of Christianity. They required strict ritual obedience in all points. "The man that doeth them shall live in them," was their unbending injunction; and, accordingly, the miraculous powers of the legislator were as often employed in inflicting tremendous judgments upon the disobedience of his followers, as in rescuing them from danger, or in relieving the pressure of their daily wants. Christ came in a meeker and milder spirit, announcing the great fact of man's reconciliation with his Maker, by gratuitous redemption communicated through the medium of faith; and the miracles which he performed were all of a benevolent description. Both arrangements, therefore, were severally apposite to the respective times, and circumstances, an designs of the laws thus promulgated. The Levitical ritual was given from Sinai, in thunders and earthquakes, and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." The coming of the Messiah was announced by angels proclaiming "peace on earth, and good will towards men." A large portion of the miraculous machinery of the *earlier* covenant, again, consisted of prophetic antici-

pations of the future spiritual prospects of mankind. This, as has been already observed, was peculiarly well fitted to the character of a merely provisional law, the most important declarations of which were all of them prospective. The prophecies of the New Testament, on the contrary, with the exception of the Apocalypse of St. John, are thinly scattered, and even where they occur resemble rather the incidental overflowings of a super-human knowledge, extending over futurity, than special forewarnings, given for some yet undeveloped purpose. The probable reason of this would seem to be, that the Divine arrangements being now complete, the attention of mankind, which previously required to be turned in a forward direction, was now more suitably rendered retrospective.

But if, for the causes now alleged, the gift of prophecy would appear to have been a less appropriate qualification of the inspired teachers of the new dispensation than of those of the old, the same argument would not apply to the question respecting miracles of another description. It may be confidently asserted that the human mind could be aroused from the inveterate associations of worldly habits, and have its attention turned away from that system of selfish indulgence so natural to its feelings, to pursuits of a directly opposite description, only by the astounding thunder-clap of a voice confessedly speaking with more than mortal authority. It is in vain to quote, in contradiction to this remark, the trite aphorism, that truth requires only to be stated in order to be assented to. The whole history of human nature is a refutation of this observation, if intended to apply to the inculcation of moral and religious truth. The conscience of every systematic sinner must be alarmed before it can be effectively awakened: the appeal to the attention of the worldly-minded must come in the form of an authoritative demand, and not of an humble *request for a hearing*. For the truth of this remark

we challenge that intuitive knowledge of the heart of man which every person who has been thrown into much practical intercourse with general society cannot fail, in some degree, of possessing. Miracles, accordingly, we are informed by Scripture, have, both under the former and the latter covenants, accompanied all special communications from heaven. Admitting the fact of such communications being not otherwise improbable, (a point which it has been the aim of the foregoing observations to prove,) it is so far from unreasonable that they should have been specially ratified by the evidence of miracles, that, in fact, we cannot conceive their effecting their intended object without such adventitious aid. If such extraordinary testimony was necessary for the establishment of the religion of Moses, it was, clearly, not less so for the supersedence of that same religion by the Gospel of Christ. Institutions which had been sanctioned by the most portentous deviations from the ordinary course of nature, could not, and in strictness ought not, to be expected to give way to the preaching of a few individuals, producing no equivalent authority in proof of their Divine mission.

Thus much, then, may be confidently urged in reply to the objections of those persons who profess to be startled and offended by the miraculous phenomena which we read of as having attended the appearance of Christ. Grant his mission to have been a real one, and it were a mere gratuitous scepticism to dispute the supernatural powers either of himself or of his authorized followers. The facts in question, be it remembered, are vouched for, unless the whole series of revelation be a fiction, not merely by their own peculiar attesting witnesses, but substantially also by those who bore testimony to the prodigies wrought by Moses and the Jewish prophets. If the attestation confirmatory of the miracles of the Old Testament is strong, the affirmative inference is, by a necessary course of argument, reflected onward

from them upon those of the latter dispensation also, as integral portions of the same continuous process of Divine interference.

To this consistency, then, of the whole design, we would appeal, for the purpose of removing from every candid and impartial mind any involuntary prepossession occasioned by the survey of isolated and detached parts. It is unfair to the infinitely accumulated evidences of our religion to consider it as depending for its proofs upon a series of unconnected interpositions of Providence, each requiring to be separately vouched for by its own peculiarly and entirely distinct arguments. The proper point of view in which it ought to be regarded is that of one great continuous miracle, to which, until the period of its final completion, generation after generation of eye-witnesses bore their successive but really concurrent testimony.

There is, however, it must be at the same time observed a degree of contemporaneous evidence attaching to the miracles recorded in the New Testament, still more cogent if possible, even than that which obliges us to assent to the authenticity of those related in the Jewish Scriptures. That is to say, from the circumstance of their having been performed at a later period of the world, and in an age of more advanced literature, the idea of explaining them away by referring them to mistake or deception is rendered still more completely untenable. "These things," as St. Paul observed of them, "were not done in a corner;" but the publicity to which they were exposed, and which he so confidently challenges, was that of jealous adversaries rather than of friends. That they were able to stand the test of this searching scrutiny is certain from the fact of the rapid spread of the doctrines, in confirmation of which those miracles were appealed to. Such is the obvious conclusion which we are compelled to arrive at, when we look to the singular transactions related in the

historical books of the New Testament, and compare them with what we there read respecting the otherwise inexplicable growth, at the period referred to, of the infant Christian Church. But it is not from these perhaps partial sources alone that we are obliged to derive our evidence. The allusions of contemporary profane writers to the as yet small, but rapidly increasing, community of Christians is exactly what might be expected, on the supposition that the account given by the New Testament is the true one. They are merely incidental, indeed, and give their testimony rather by implication than by express and direct assertion, but this very circumstance only renders it more intrinsically probable. In the first place, the broad outline of facts, as we find them occasionally referred to in the works of that period, though often vague, are all at least perfectly in harmony with the Scriptural account. We know, for instance, as assuredly as we do any of the transactions of modern history, that towards the close of the reign of Tiberius a peculiar sect grew up amongst the Jews, who confidently asserted that occurrences of the most extraordinary description had taken place at Jerusalem, and in the surrounding territory, within an extremely short period from that time, some of them in the presence of large multitudes of witnesses, and one, the most remarkable, in the face of the whole assembled population of Judea. We know that, notwithstanding this appeal to public notoriety, which, if the statement were untrue, carried with it its own refutation, these accounts were received as authentic by vast numbers of persons competent to judge of the reality of the facts, many of whom bore testimony, by their blood, to the sincerity of their belief. We know that the doctrines thus originating pervaded, within a very short period of years, considerable portions of Asia, of Greece, of Italy, and most probably of Spain and *Gaul;* and that though the most terrific persecutions

awaited their professors, vast numbers were found even in Rome itself, who submitted to endure the most cruel deaths rather than abjure their faith. But, as has just now been observed, some of the casual circumstances, related incidentally, and without any intended reference to the circumstances of the early Christians, by contemporary profane historians, afford, where they least intended it, a singular collateral confirmation of the truth of the Gospel history. Thus we find, in the fourth book of Tacitus's history, a strange anecdote related of the Emperor Vespasian (who, be it remembered, had passed a considerable portion of his military career in Judea,) that when he visited Egypt, subsequently to his accession to the empire, he cured by a touch a man afflicted with total blindness. It is impossible to read the original account of this transaction without observing its strong resemblance to some of the miracles performed by our Saviour. How, it naturally occurs to us to ask, could so strange an idea occur to a Roman Emperor, the occupier of a throne which had so recently been filled by such profligate characters as Vitellius, Otho, and Nero, as that of attempting to perform a preternatural cure of this description? None of the most insanely arrogant of his predecessors had ever made the like experiment. We surely cannot doubt but that Vespasian's long residence in Judea had made him familiar with the recorded facts of our Saviour's history, and with the more recent miracles of his disciples, and that he was led by vanity, or curiosity, to attempt performing the like wonders. That he succeeded we of course cannot believe; though it is most probable that plausible testimony would not be wanting to support the claims of an emperor ambitious of this peculiar kind of reputation. To the same effect are the two memorable passages which occur in Tacitus and Suetonius, where those writers apply to the *person of* Vespasian the ancient Jewish prophecy

respecting the Messiah, whose advent was looked for about that period. The words of the latter historian are very remarkable. "Percrebuerat Oriente toto *vetus et constans opinio* esse in fatis ut *eo tempore Judæa profecti rerum potirentur*. Id de Imperatore Romano quantum postea eventu patuit, prædictum Judæi ad se trahentes rebellarunt." In this statement it is impossible not to recognise the expectation then prevalent among the Jews respecting the approaching accomplishment of the seventy weeks of Daniel, which we learn from Josephus to have led to those many insurrections, under the guidance of fanatics and impostors, which eventually caused the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish nation.

But (to return from the indirect testimony of profane to the direct evidence of sacred history) we shall not, we conceive, be chargeable with the fallacy of proving a thing by itself, if we appeal to the inspired writers themselves, as affording the strongest possible confirmation of the truth of the miracles they record. It has been already observed, that the prophetic character, with the exception of the apocalypse of St. John, attaches much less to the books of the New than to those of the Old Testament. That there are however, predictions contained in the Christian Scriptures, the fulfilment of which has been so literally accomplished as to leave no possibility of doubt respecting the inspiration of their authors, provided we admit the genuineness of the works in question, is, on the other hand, perfectly certain. Those of St. Paul, which allude to the corruptions which would one day prevail in the Christian Church, and which so accurately describe some of the leading abominations of Popery, cannot indeed be got rid of even by the presumption of their being a forgery, as they are, at all events, demonstrably of a much earlier date than can be assigned to the first *origin of* the abuses which they denounce. But

going farther back in time, and referring to the prophetic denunciations of our Saviour respecting the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, we may confidently assert of them, that if the date assigned to them be accurate, they prove to demonstration that he who uttered them was possessed of more than human knowledge. It is impossible to read the twenty-first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, and other similar passages in the four Evangelists, respecting the fearful calamities which were in preparation for that devoted city, and then to compare them with the account given by Josephus of what actually passed during the horrible circumstances of the siege by which it was overpowered, without assenting to the certainty of this conclusion. In the twenty-third chapter of St. Luke we read, for instance, that our Redeemer addressed the following words to the women who followed him with their lamentations to the place of his crucifixion:—"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children; for, behold! the days are coming in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. *Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, fall on us, and to the hills, cover us.*" If we wish to understand the allusion contained in the latter part of this address, we have only to turn to the seventh, eighth, and ninth chapters of the sixth book of Josephus's Wars of the Jews, and we there find that when the siege of Jerusalem, under Titus, was drawing to its last crisis, many of the mutineers within the walls, who had first stirred up the rebellion against the Roman power, and who had exercised, in the course of the war, the most atrocious cruelties against their own countrymen, desperate of pardon from either party, betook themselves, as their last resource, *to the excavations formed under the town by the working of the quarries, and there* perished to the *number of more than two thousand* by suicide, by mutual

violence, and by hunger. There is, assuredly, none of the calculated ambiguity of false oracles, concealing their real ignorance under the shelter of equivocal expressions, observable in this singular prophecy. What proof, then, have we that this prediction was uttered nearly forty years before the events which it foretold, and that Jerusalem was still in existence at the time that it was thus recorded by the Evangelist in the Gospel which bears his name? The argument, which lies in small compass, may be shortly stated thus. The prophecy above quoted occurs, as has been stated, in St. Luke's Gospel. But the same author, in his preface to his book of the Acts of the Apostles, refers to his Gospel as a *former* treatise. The date of the book of the Acts, then, is confessedly later than that of the Gospel of this writer. But the book of the Acts itself breaks off suddenly, after relating the conclusion of the first imprisonment of Paul in Rome, which is generally supposed to have terminated about the year of Christ 65 or 66; that is to say, four or five years before the capture of Jerusalem. The proof, then, of the real antiquity of the prediction contained in the Gospel of St. Luke, will turn upon the evidence which we have of that of the book of the Acts. Now, that this latter work was written very soon after the occurrence of the last events which it records, is obvious from the strongest internal evidence. It is impossible to suppose that the writer was acquainted with the interesting transactions which subsequently to the above date marked the few closing years of the life of the great apostle of the Gentiles, when he composed this history, and that he purposely abstained from relating them. We may confidently, then, assume the date of this production to have been that just now stated; whilst, for the actual authenticity of the work, as the genuine *production* of one who himself witnessed the events *which* he relates, we may at once appeal to one of

the ablest and most unanswerable arguments which modern literature has produced. We know not, in fact, how it is possible to escape from the demonstration afforded by Paley of the authenticity of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and of the Epistles of St. Paul. But this proof, once established, extends wider than the peculiar purpose, to establish which that acute writer adduced it. These books, it should be remembered, necessarily presuppose the existence not of the Gospel of Luke only, but the authenticity of at least a large portion of the miraculous facts detailed by the other Evangelists, and of all the main doctrines connected with the theory of our redemption. It is quite inconceivable that *they* should be genuine, and that the histories to which they appear uniformly to refer should be supposititious.* In fact,

* The following extracts from the general remarks subjoined by the learned Dr. Laurence, the present Archbishop of Cashel, to his publication of the singular apocryphal work, "Ascensio Isaiæ Vatis," contain so strong a confirmation of the fact of the implicit belief attached, within the limits of the apostolical age itself, to one of the most frequently questioned preternatural events recorded by the Evangelists, namely, the miraculous conception of Christ, that we shall make no apology for their length.

"From internal testimony, of a still more definite description, I conceive that even the specific time of its composition (that of the work here alluded to) may be satisfactorily ascertained. It speaks only of *one* persecution of Christians as taking place between the establishment of Christianity and the day of Judgment. This must, necessarily, have been the persecution under *Nero*. Had the author lived so late as the reign of *Domitian*, he would scarcely have limited the scene of Christian suffering to a single persecution, and have foretold the dissolution of all things as shortly succeeding it. Nor, indeed, are we left to mere conjecture relative to the particular persecution alluded to; but demonstrable proof exists, that it could only have been *the first*. For Isaiah is introduced as prophesying, that at its commencement, 'Berial shall descend, the mighty angel, the prince of this world, which he has possessed from its creation. He shall descend from the firmament in the form of a man, *an impious monarch, the murderer of his mother;* in the form of him, *the sovereign of the world.*" Now, it is evident that the singular circumstance here stated of the arch fiend Berial, possessing the body of "*an impious monarch, the murderer of his mother,*" is only applicable to *Nero*, who is recorded to have stabbed his mother, Agrippina. But something more precise still follows. For we are further told, that he shall have power "*three years, seven months, and twenty-seven days.*" The burning of Rome took place on the 19th June, A.D. 64. The crime of this conflagration, which excited universal abhorrence, Nero imputed to the *Christians and from hence* sprung the first persecution. Historians are

from the first opening of the narrative of the New Testament down to the time when the canon of the Christian Scriptures was universally acknowledged to be such as we now receive it, there is no one open

not agreed as to the exact time of its commencement. But Mosheim, upon authority which he respects, fixes it to the month of November, A.D. 64. If, then, we compute backwards to the death of Nero, which happened upon June 9, A.D. 68, the period of *three years, seven months, and twenty-seven days*, (considering the months as lunar, and the year 68 as a leap year,) we shall find, that the day allotted to the commencement of Berial's power falls upon the 30th day of October, A.D. 64; a coincidence, I apprehend, sufficiently close to prove that the persecution referred to must, indisputably, have been the first.

"The conclusion, then, will be, that our author wrote after the death of Nero; that is, after June 9, A.D. 68. But the most striking circumstance still remains to be noticed. For, from what immediately follows, it appears, that although he must have written *after* the 9th of June, A.D. 68, he must likewise have written *before* the close of the year 69. In the very next verse but one to that, which relates the downfall of Nero's tyranny, it is added, "*After three hundred and thirty-two days* the Lord shall come with his angels and holy powers, from the seventh heaven, in the splendour of that heaven and shall drag Berial and his powers into Gehenna." And again, "Then shall the voice of the Beloved rebuke in wrath the heaven, and the dry land, the mountains, and the hills, the cities, and the deserts, the north, the angel of the sun, the moon, and every thing where Berial has been seen and manifested in this world. There shall also be *a resurrection and judgment in those days*, while the Beloved shall cause to ascend from him a fire *to consume all the ungodly, who shall be as if they never had been created.*" Had the work been written subsequently to the *three hundred and thirty-two days* which followed the death of Nero, the author of it could never, surely, have been absurd enough to fix a time for the conclusion of the world, for the resurrection, and for the day of Judgment, which time *had already* elapsed! In full persuasion that the Lord was indeed at hand, particularly after the bloody scenes of systematic torture which he had witnessed, he might, indeed, have ventured to predict the almost immediate advent of Christ to judgment: but it is impossible to conceive, that in his sober senses he could have referred the consummation of all things to a *past* period. It seems certain, therefore, if the premises from which I have argued be correct, that the book must have been composed towards the close of the year 68, or in the beginning of the year 69."

The Archbishop, after some further observations, proceeds to state:—

"I would remark, that in the work before us, the miraculous conception is distinctly and unequivocally asserted: which circumstance affords incontestible proof, if my previous reasoning be correct, that the fact was on record at no great distance of time from the period when St. Matthew's Gospel itself is said by Irenæus to have been written. Indeed, the author of the "Ascension of Isaiah" seems to have borrowed the outline of his narrative from that very Gospel.

"The Evangelist thus expresses himself: "When his mother, *Mary, was betrothed to Joseph*, before they came together, *she was found with child of the Holy Ghost* Then Joseph, her husband, was minded

interval, however short, in which we can, with the slightest degree of probability, imagine the imposition of a set of forged documents upon mankind under the form of authentic revelation. Some considerable period must always elapse before any unfounded traditions could, under the most favourable circumstances, obtain any general belief. But the interval which elapsed between the crucifixion of Christ and that time when we find the early Christian writers appealing to the Christian Scriptures, such as we now possess them, with the most unsuspecting reliance upon their authenticity, is much too short to admit, with the remotest degree of probability, of this supposition. What possible combination of circumstances, for instance, could induce well-informed Englishmen of the present day to receive implicitly as true a series of forged documents, the production of unknown persons, at some intermediate period, which should positively assert that the most stupendous miracles were publicly exhibited in London at the time of the accession of the House of Hanover to the British throne; and could make them lay down their lives in confirmation of their belief?

to put her away privily." Our author relates the same occurrences, almost in the same language: "I beheld a woman, by name *Mary, who was a virgin, and betrothed to a man, by name Joseph. I saw, that after she was betrothed she was found pregnant; and that Joseph was inclined to put her away.*" The latter part of the account is thus related by the Evangelist: "Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, *did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son.*" With a little variation, it is thus related by our author: "Then *the Angel of the Spirit* appeared in the world; *after which Joseph did not put away Mary, ... neither did he approach her, but preserved her as a holy virgin, notwithstanding her pregnancy.*"

"From a collation of these respective passages it must appear, I apprehend, to every critic whose mind is not warped by theological prejudices, that the latter account was borrowed from the former. And if so, it must be obvious, that the narrative of the miraculous conception extant in all the manuscripts and versions of St. Matthew's Gospel, was not a subsequent interpolation, but an original part of that Gospel. Nor does it seem less certain, that the same narrative was believed, as well by *Jewish* as by *Heathen* converts, long before the termination of the first century," &c.

And yet the period is not so long from the date of the crucifixion to the time when Justin Martyr wrote his Apologies for Christianity, (works teeming with direct quotations from the New Testament, as we now receive it, and with incidental allusions to the sentiments of those inspired writings, which show how completely they had become part and parcel of his opinions,) as it is from the accession of George I. to the present day. If, however, the writings of the New Testament be really authentic, then we must confidently assert of them, as we have already done on a former occasion, of the histories of the Old Testament, that they afford irrefragable proof of the reality of the miracles which they relate. It is impossible that the books themselves could be contemporaneous with the times, the history of which they profess to record, that they should have been received as worthy of credit by the parties to whom they were addressed, and yet, that matters of such palpable and accessible notoriety should have been falsely stated in them. "For revealed religion," said Dr Johnson, a few days before his death, and the dying declarations of such a man surely ought to carry with them no small authority, "for revealed religion there is such historical evidence as, upon any subject not religious, would have left no doubt. Had the facts recorded in the New Testament been mere civil occurrences, no one would have called in question the testimony by which they are established; but the importance annexed to them, amounting to nothing less than the salvation of mankind, raises a cloud in our minds, and creates doubts unknown upon any other subject. With respect to evidence, we have not such evidence that Cæsar died in the capitol as that Christ died in the manner related."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Of the Evidence of the Truth of Revelation afforded by the low Condition in Life, the absence of Literary Acquirements, and the impossibility of Confederacy in its respective Promulgators.

THE character and condition in life of the first preachers of Christianity, and of revelation in general, suggest, again, another argument in favour of the truth of their doctrines, which it would perplex the Infidel to overthrow. The following reply of Lactantius, to the assertions of one of the early impugners and persecutors of our faith, may be appositely applied, not to the case of Peter and Paul only, but to that of almost all the respective authors of the inspired books, both Jewish and Christian. "Tantum abest a Divinis literis repugnantia, quantum ille (adversarius videlicet) abfuit a veritate et fide. Præcipue tamen Paulum Petrumque laceravit ceterosque discipulos, tanquam fallaciæ seminatores, quos eosdem tamen rudes et indoctos fuisse testatus est; nam quosdam eorum piscatorio artificio fecisse quæstum: quasi ægrè ferret quod illam rem non Aristophanes aliquis aut Aristarchus commentatus sit. Abfuit ergo ab his fingendi voluntas et astutia, quoniam rudes fuerunt. Aut quis possit indoctus apta inter se et cohærentia fingere, quum philosophorum doctissimi Plato et Aristoteles et Epicurus et Zenon ipsi sibi repugnantia et contraria dixerint? hæc est enim mendaciorum natura, ut cohærere non possint. Illorum autem traditio, quia vera est, quadrat undique, ac sibi tota consentit; et ideo persuadet quia constanti ratione suffulta est." This observation, which carries with it great weight, when directed to the various component parts of Scripture individually, is perfectly unanswerable when applied to the entire and *consistent* scheme of revelation as a whole. Seldom,

if ever, is any one single impostor entirely accordant with himself: a succession of impostors, writing at separate and remote periods the one from the other, cannot by any possibility be so. And yet where, from the fall of Adam downwards, to the final close of the work of inspiration, can we detect one single violation of unity of purpose in the theory of God's interferences for the redemption of mankind,—where point out one absent link from the chain of connected consequences? The whole is obviously the grouping and calculated contrivance of one master-mind.

Had the self-same tenets, with those promulgated in Holy Writ, been first taught by any of the great moral sages of Greece or Rome, it is evident that, although that circumstance ought not in reality to have operated against the value of their instructions, it would certainly have suggested a plausible argument against the Divine authority attaching to them, of which the sceptic would not have failed to take advantage. No reason, it might have been said, can be adduced to show that a first rate understanding, taking into consideration all the anomalous features of man's moral constitution, might not, by a lucky accident, have lighted upon such a plausible vindication of God's Providence, in his dealings with the human race, as the Christian theory supposes. The great superiority of such a theory over those invented by the several founders of the other great schools of philosophy, it might have been urged, no more proves the Divine inspiration of its promulgator, than the superior beauties of the works of Homer or Shakspeare, to those of most other poets, would necessarily oblige us to attribute their peculiar degree of genius to a like Divine source. Undoubtedly it would have been difficult to meet successfully objections of this nature. As there is no assignable and definite *limit* to the inventive powers of the human mind, it *is evident* that the production of any one work, of

even unprecedented merit, by one individual, would only be another and a new measure afforded us of what the intellect of man can achieve, and would supply no proof whatever that such individual was inspired. But the whole canon of Scripture, as we possess it, is a complete refutation of this objection in every form in which it is capable of being put with respect to the inspiration of the Bible. Nothing can it is true, be more entire and consistent with itself than the scheme of revelation as a whole, but on the other hand, it is equally certain that nothing can be more seemingly desultory, can bear more positive proofs of the absence of any thing like confederacy, or be less set off by elaborate splendour of composition, than the greater part of those writings through the medium of which that revelation is conveyed. One strong internal proof of the real inspiration attributable to the sacred authors, for instance, is the fact, that many of them are not only known to have been ignorant men in general, but also appear, on several occasions, to have been perfectly unaware of the value of the very facts which they were communicating. With reference to one another, so far from appearing to be united in a common combination to deceive, they often seemingly, though perhaps never substantially, contradict each other's statements, in minute particulars, and sometimes even in momentous points of doctrine. Not only do they not appear to wish to theorize, but it may even be doubted how far many of them, at the moment that their works were composed, possessed any definite theory beyond that of the single fact of the promised redemption of the Israelitish people. In order to understand what Christianity, in all its parts, really is, we must study not one Gospel only, nor even the whole four Gospels, but the entire book of the New Testament, from the beginning to the end: and even then our conclusions would be incomplete, as to its vast importance and the elaborate contrivance of Providence for its

production, unless we extend our researches backward, from the last book of the Old Testament to the very first page of Genesis itself. And yet among the great multitude of writers whose respective compositions constitute that single and consistent work which we call the Bible, only two individuals, namely, Moses and Paul, could for a moment, under any circumstances, be suspected of a tendency or disposition to set up what might justly be denominated *a system*. But Moses, if he systematized at all, must obviously have had an eye to the permanence of his own institutions, and have striven more to establish his own efficiency, as a legislator, than to act in the capacity of a mere forerunner of a code of doctrines by which his own were to be eventually superseded: —whilst, again, Paul, however disposed he may have been to concentrate the facts and doctrines connected with Christ's advent into one consistent series of propositions, at all events came after those facts upon which he builds his conclusions had already taken place, and after the greater portion of those doctrines had been promulged and commented upon by others.

If, then, there is, as there assuredly seems to be, a traceable consistency in Scripture, which marks the agency and dictation of one predominating mind, it certainly is not to the ostensible authors of its several component parts that such consistency can be referred. If their pens were so guided that each individual performed exactly his own necessary share in the construction of the work, and no more, and if, without natural eloquence, without the acquirements of literature, and without any of the known qualifications by which sages and legislators have been occasionally enabled to impress a new character upon society, these men have operated the greatest change in human manners recorded in history, we must surely look elsewhere than to themselves for the great *moving* principle. It is in vain for us to examine the

Divine Scriptures with the fastidious eye of critics, and to attempt to show that the work might have been better and more systematically done. The best answer to such objections is, that the work *is done:* that the Bible has been the instrument, which has rendered the manners of modern times, not excepting those of many unbelievers themselves, more humane, more polished, and ten thousand times more pure, than those of the best periods of antiquity: and that if, upon reference to the writings which have wrought such wonders, we seem often to miss that elegance of style and those nice accomplishments which mark the highly-finished productions of professionul men of letters, it is, in fact, only one miracle the more, and the more manifestly "the Lord's doing."

Those persons who are disposed to believe that Providence has, from first to last, superintended the developement and promulgation of Christianity, taking care that the most important of all communications should be made as accessible as possible to the whole human race, will probably be disposed to consider the singular fact that the whole of the New Testament has descended to us in the Greek and not in the Aramaic language, as another internal proof of the Divine benevolence and wisdom. Certain it is, from the history of mankind subsequent to the commencement of the Christian era, that no other language would have supplied so universally convenient a vehicle for the general transmission of truth as the one which, for many centuries since the coming of Christ, was that of the predominant power of Europe, and which is at this moment, as it is likely to continue to be, one of the foremost objects of the study of men of letters throughout the civilized world.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Conclusion.

RETURNING, then, to the main proposition with which we set out, we have no hesitation in asserting that, setting aside all gratuitous theories of what we might conceive the system of the universe possibly to have been, had it pleased God so to arrange it, and taking the actual acknowledged facts of human nature as the foundation of the argument, there is an appositeness and relevancy to our moral wants in the scheme of revelation, such as we have received it, which affords a strong, we might surely add, an overpowering, evidence of its Divine origin. Were it confessedly the suggestion of philosophical ingenuity, it would probably be acknowledged by every class of men to be by many degrees the most plausible conjecture in the records of literature; whilst, as a matter of practice, it is undoubtedly calculated to extirpate more of the evil propensities of the heart, and to develope, or, to speak more properly, to create a greater capability of virtue than all the united ethical theories which human ingenuity has produced. The experiment has now been made for the space of nearly eighteen centuries, and it may confidently be asserted of it, that where fairly tried, it has invariably succeeded in raising the standard of civilization, and promoting social and domestic happiness. It is no argument against it to allege, as the infidels are in the habit of doing, the miseries produced during the same period of time by the malignant passions of mankind under the assumed sanction of its name. None but those who are already predisposed from other causes to calumniate revelation, would venture to attach any *weight to* such uncandid allegations. "The time

cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service," was the prophetic remark of our Saviour upon the abuses which he foresaw would one day be perpetrated under the pretext of religion; and certain it is, that human cruelty seldom attains to so acrimonious a perfection of bitterness as when concentrated and excited by the demoniacal spirit of ignorant fanaticism. But the answer here is a short and a plain one. Neither hatred, pride, ambition, persecution, nor any other evil and carnal passion, however plausibly disguised, can ever be otherwise than directly opposed to the meek and unresisting principles of the Gospel; and precisely in the same proportion in which any taint of such propensities shall have at any time been found to have influenced the conduct of otherwise sincere Christians, must they be considered to have retrograded from their faith. The fact is, that the history of strongly excited human passion, be the ostensible exciting motive what it will, is almost invariably the history of human crime. Never is the understanding less fitted to judge calmly and, therefore, soundly,—never is the heart less accessible to the complacent feeling of devotion in all its overflowing tenderness of universal charity, than when religion is made a war cry, or the rallying signal of a party. In order to know the immense degree of temporal good which the doctrines of the Gospel have wrought, and are at this moment working in society, we must look, then, not to the glare of public events, where, perhaps, a few great and triumphant examples of unshaken rectitude of principle afford a poor consolation to the spectator for the general scene of wretchedness and wickedness which he is compelled to witness, but to the noiseless retirement of domestic life; to those unobtrusive circles in which the Christian virtues, as they are expelled one by one from the arena of worldly clamour, take their final refuge. To this surest and most *unfailing test*, every sincere believer will confidently

appeal for the evidences of the soundness of those principles which he acknowledges, against the taunts of the unbeliever. He will point to the abode of those whom the world deems unfortunate, but who are inwardly conscious of possessing a treasure which they would not exchange for all the external prosperity of those who despise them; to the bedchamber of the invalid, who cheerfully recognises the hand of a father and benefactor in the stroke which chastises him; to traits of feminine and almost infantine heroism, in comparison of which the legends of Pagan antiquity fade away into nothing; and, as a case not less in point, to the jaded feelings of the worn out votary of wealth or ambition, who has at length begun to perceive the vanity of all human pursuits, excepting that of the one thing, which in the sunny season of life he had contemptuously overlooked. The healing operation of the Gospel principles upon all the weaknesses and infirmities and irritations to which our nature is subject, *cannot*, we repeat, *be the result of mere accident*. There must be something in them of Divine contrivance, some relevancy, however inexplicable, to the constitution of our hearts and understanding. Falsehood and imposture are in their very nature so repugnant to the general well-being of mankind, and to our necessary apprehensions of the Divine attributes, that to suppose them capable of producing all the effects of the holiest truths, not only in this or that instance, but in every department and under every possible modification of society, would be the greatest of absurdities. If it is alleged in reply to this observation, that Christianity is only so far beneficial in its effects upon the human heart, inasmuch as it comprehends all the principles of natural religion, to the excellence and Divine origin of which the sceptic professes to assent equally with ourselves, our answer is, that we deny that mere natural religion can produce the result now described. *We do not* pretend nor wish to undervalue the prin-

ciples of sound theism so far as they will go. They constitute, we admit, integral portions of the truth, but still, we assert, that they are not the whole truth; and we would add, also, that the points in which they are defective are those very points in which the weakness of human nature most earnestly requires their help. In every thing that has reference to the position of man with respect to his Creator, to the peculiar difficulties connected with the undoubted phenomena of the Divine government, and every most earnest wish and want of the human heart, we must have recourse solely and exclusively to the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. The moral anomalies which, in the midst of an astonishingly beautiful material creation, we cannot but observe around us, suggest the antagonist propositions against which the Gospel revelations are placed in direct counteraction. In admitting, then, the fact of the existence of the former, it would seem impossible, if we would vindicate to our reasons the ways of Providence, to deny the reality of the latter. Why, then, has this splendid doctrine been received with so much haughty superciliousness, not to say with so much virulence of hostility, as we know that it has been received, by men of high acquirements in literature, and even sometimes of correct moral habits? The Gospel itself will supply the answer, "that its kingdom is not of this world;" that it is not a mere ingenious theory, in discussing which philosophical minds may exercise their acuteness, but that it is a practical, and often a painful, course of moral discipline, entailing upon its professors no slight degree of self-restraint, and the abjuration of no small proportion of the more immediate attractions of this life. Nor is this all. Calculated, as it really is, to meet and satisfy our most urgent moral wants, still the truth of this fact is far, very far, from being prominently evident to all classes of persons. The patient requires to be *satisfied* of the existence of the malady before

he calls in the aid of the physician. But such are the distractions of society, and so numerous the occupations which divert us from the habit of deep spiritual reflection, that the interior of their own breasts remains to the last an unexplored region to the greater portion of mankind. Let them, indeed, take the trouble of tracing consequence after consequence as they arise in necessary succession, from the acknowledged principles of universal morals, and we have no doubt that the uniform result to most minds would be, a disposition to hail the communications of revelation as bearing the decisive stamp of authenticity. But this is a trouble which few individuals imagine that they have leisure, and still fewer find that they have the disposition, to undertake. To such men, accordingly, Christianity comes as medicine tendered to the sound, or the solution of an enigma to those who are not conscious of the difficulty. Its first impression, therefore, upon them is, that of its being something superfluous, which they may well afford to do without, and which, therefore, would argue a meddlesome pertinacity in those who would anxiously direct their attention to it.

The long continued operation of miracles, also, of which the Bible requires our belief, and the transcendental mysteries which it inculcates as matters of faith, though involving no real improbability, if rightly considered, must be confessed to be well calculated to startle most persons, who come for the first time to the consideration of its evidences. In order fully to appreciate the physical difficulty which even the most intelligent and well regulated minds must have felt, to conquer their prepossession against revelation, occasioned by the detail of preternatural occurrences which it records, it will be proper, before we conclude, to revert once more to the notice of one of those instinctive operations of our minds, with respect to the existence of which, as we have before observed, all metaphysicians appear to be agreed.

The operation alluded to has been already stated to be that by which, prior to, and independently of, all systematic reasoning, we derive our belief in the permanency and inviolability of the ordinary laws of nature from the simple fact of our own past personal experience. It has been often and often repeated by those persons who have most studied the phenomena of the human mind, that in consequence of our inability to trace any connexion between cause and effect, we can have no possible ground for anticipating the recurrence of any, the most natural incident, beyond that of our recollection of the uniformity of its past occurrence under analogous circumstances. Such are the strange processes by which we reason, that this axiom, which in fact supplies the strongest theoretical argument in *favour* of what we should deem miracles, (inasmuch as it would show that, for any thing we know to the contrary, any result whatever may be the result of any antecedent operation,) still affords, practically, the most powerful though not the most sound, presumption *against* them. "Such and such things happen in a certain order; therefore they will always so happen." This is, perhaps, the first general maxim at which the human mind, in the commencement of life, arrives. No doubt Providence has wisely contrived, not only that every man, but probably, that every animal endued with consciousness, in order that it may be enabled to procure its own subsistence, should have a necessary and instinctive impression, that certain effects will invariably result from certain causes. But it is obvious that this conclusion is the result of no legitimate process of ratiocination. "It is impossible," says Hume, "that this inference of the (brute) animal can be founded on any process of argument or reasoning, by which he concludes, that like events must follow like objects, and that the course of nature will always be regular in its operations. *For if* there be, in reality, any arguments of

this nature, they surely lie too abstruse for the observation of such imperfect understandings; since it may well employ the utmost care and attention of a philosophic genius to discover and observe them. Animals, therefore, are not guided in these inferences by *reasoning;* neither are children: neither are the generality of mankind, in their ordinary actions and conclusions: *neither are philosophers themselves*, who, in all the active parts of life, are, in the main, the same with the vulgar, and are governed by the same maxims. Nature must have provided some other principle, of more ready and more general use and application; nor can an operation of such immense consequence in life as that of inferring effects from causes be trusted to the uncertain process of reasoning and argumentation. Were this doubtful with regard to men, it seems to admit of no question with regard to the brute creation; and the conclusion being once firmly established in the one, we have a strong presumption, from all the rules of analogy, that it ought to be universally admitted without any exception or reserve. It is custom alone which engages animals, from every object that strikes their senses, to infer its usual attendant, and carries their imagination, from the appearance of the one, to conceive the other in that particular manner which we denominate belief. No other explanation can be given of this operation, in all the higher as well as lower classes of sensitive beings which fall under our notice and observation."* Without this powerful association here stated, it would undoubtedly be impossible for us not only to provide for coming occurrences, but even duly to avail ourselves of the present blessings which the bounty of the Creator has spread before us. The sceptical philosopher, however, from whose writings the above extract is made, has attached so much importance to this fact, that upon

* Hume's Essay on the Reason of Animals.

it, that is to say, upon our presumed incapability of believing any thing which is contrary to our uniform past experience, he has built his celebrated dictum, that "no testimony whatever is sufficient to establish a miracle." It is, to be sure, somewhat inconsistent, in a statement thus undoubtedly promulgated, that this bold proposition should be admitted by its propounder to be founded, as is above seen, upon no necessary, nor even probable, inference of the *reason;* but to be a mere consequence of the arbitrary construction of the mind; and that he should allow, almost in the same breath, that no, however portentous deviation from the general order of events, independently of that instinctive association, ought, properly, to excite in us any surprise whatever. "The bread," says he, "which I formerly ate, nourished me; that is, a body of such sensible qualities was, at that time, endued with such secret powers. But does it follow that other bread must also nourish me at another time, and that like sensible qualities must always be attended with the like secret powers? *The consequence seems nowise necessary.*"* What is this admission, then, but that there is nothing in what we should grant to be a real miracle, that is to say, a decided deviation from seemingly established cause and effect, which, in strict reason, ought to surprise us? But such contradictions are, perhaps, to be expected the moment that we launch into the region of metaphysical abstractions. In a certain sense, however, the sincerest Christian believer will readily grant the greater part, though, assuredly, he will not assent to the entire whole, of the foregoing assertions. He will cheerfully acknowledge, with Hume, that knowing really nothing of the necessary connexion of causation, we have no reason, theoretically, for supposing any miracle whatever (using that word in its commonly received acceptation) to

* Hume's Sceptical Doubts.

be really impossible: but he will also allow, because it is what every reasonable person must feel, that the natural, and almost necessary presumption of our minds is, that the order of nature, such as we know it from experience to be, is, as a general rule, fixed and permanent. It is obvious, however, and should never be forgotten, that, whilst the former of these propositions is a direct inference from the principles of sound and laborious reasoning, the latter is an inert and involuntary animal impression only. We believe in it, because we find ourselves, from the constitution of our nature, impelled to do so; but we can assign no other reason for it than that God, for wise, practical, but secondary purposes, has so disposed us. The fact is, that the moment that we examine this last axiom, the more we find ourselves obliged to question its philosophical accuracy. Nothing, assuredly, can be more experimentally certain, than that the phenomena of nature have not always been what they are this moment. And yet we can no more conceive the fact of a creation of the universe, or that of the first production of any single plant or animal, than we can any of the most astounding miracles of Scripture. Such occurrences are certainly equally opposed, with those last mentioned, to our daily and uniform experience, and therefore, according to Hume's argument, ought to be equally revolting to the understanding. But with regard to those former facts, they are as certain and demonstrable as any the best attested occurrences of our own times. That such things have been, is no longer a doubt with the most hardened and pertinacious sceptic. But if so, there is assuredly no reason why we should stop at this point, and, having admitted the uncertainty of the test of mere experience thus far, should deny that the same argument may be legitimately extended much further.

Though, however, such an inference would seem to be nothing more than what is strictly reasonable.

still, we repeat, the blind and instinctive impression of the human mind is on the other side. All persons whatever in their ordinary, and the greater proportion of mankind in their permanent, habits, are startled and offended by any assertion of the reality of what, in common language, and under common circumstances, would be deemed impossibilities. The ignorant no less than the learned can say what is accordant with, or contrary to, their personal experience, and by far the greater portion of mankind, whether ignorant or learned, will reason no further. It requires, in fact, no small degree of the power of philosophical abstraction, to perceive that many things which by the vulgar are considered as impossibilities, are not only possible but necessary inferences from undoubted premises. Until, however, this truth be made not only demonstrable, but familiar to the mind, a prejudice against the wonders related in Scripture must ever, to a certain degree, exist in the breasts of even the devout and well-disposed, whilst the same facts will be exultingly selected from the general context of revelation, by the thoughtless and profane, as triumphant proofs of the credulity of the single-minded, and the utter incredibility of the whole theory of our faith. But the influential causes, to which we must attribute the widely extending indifference amongst worldly men with respect to evangelical truth, do not terminate here. Christianity, we should recollect, in addition to its being exposed *in limine* to the strong involuntary objection above alluded to, finds also a still more formidable, because a far less innocent, predisposition of the human mind arrayed against it, from the many sacrifices of presumed personal convenience it requires, and the difficult course of spiritual discipline which it would enforce. Here, again, every metaphysician will tell us, that, independently of the moral disqualification which licentious habits create for the perception of *the intrinsic beauty* of true holiness, another objec

tion to its reception occurs, founded like the former rather upon the mechanism and original constitution of our minds, than upon real exercise of the reasoning powers. The first and instinctive impulse of every person, not with respect to religious questions only, but in all the common transactions of life, is to believe rather what he wishes to be true, than what actually is so. This impression, an unreasonable and a mischievous one no doubt, suggests itself uncalled for, and, in nine cases out of ten, influences the choice and moulds the opinions of the average members of society; whilst, on the other hand, that strength of mind, which, setting passion and prejudice apart, withholds its judgment till it has found substantial reasons on which to found an inference, is attained with difficulty, and consequently falls to the lot of comparatively few. In no case, however, perhaps, does the above-mentioned unreasoning prejudice operate more widely than in that of the formation of our religious opinions. A business-like, calculating, and money-making community, do not readily turn aside from their favourite course in pursuit of inquiries of this nature, where no immediate worldly advantage is at hand to reward their labour. So long, accordingly, as they can keep the momentous questions of revelation at a distance, and by so doing can contrive to know no more of it than that it requires their belief in prodigies perfectly unlike to any thing which has ever occurred within their own knowledge, whilst they feel also that its entire adoption would stand in the way of that self-indulgence to which the corrupt human heart is so naturally prone, religious belief in the full, strict, evangelical sense of the term, must to them be really impossible. Public decorum, and an idea that a professed deference to the established worship of the country is required of them as citizens, may procure their external assent to its forms; and so long as that natural sense of the rules of morality, which the Christian revela-

tion has so much heightened and improved, even in the case of those who deny its evidences, continues to supply a general standard for their conduct, they may pass through life perhaps not only plausibly, but really usefully, as members of the social community. Examples, however, such as these can never be quoted as a realization of the blessed effects which Christianity was intended to produce among the human race.

We should form a very inadequate notion of the value of the Gospel, were we to suppose that it had completed its work when it had smoothed the rough exterior of public manners, and, having inculcated a certain series of moral maxims much too refined and unearthly for the mere worldly mind to adopt, as a rule of practice, or even to appreciate, that it has left human nature as cold and as incapable of holy aspirations as it found it. That stupendous dispensation is assuredly, if true, far, very far, too elaborate an arrangement of Providence to rest contented with this humble result. It is either something vastly superior to every possible worldly object, or it is nothing. No reasonable Christian, any more than any other reasonable person, believes gratuitously, unnecessarily, and from a natural predisposition, in miracles. He knows, he sees as clearly as Hume or any other sceptic, that God never disturbs the established order of his own works, but for some truly extraordinary and paramount object. If, then, notwithstanding this original bias to the contrary, the overpowering force of external and internal evidence obliges him to admit that such preternatural interpositions have really taken place; and if he finds that the choice between assent and unbelief is after all a choice of difficulties, and yet that upon due and cautious examination he cannot but admit that the affirmative side of the question is, beyond comparison, the most probable, still the very feeling of amazement with which he concludes his inquiry leaves him under an

awe-struck impression of the infinite importance of the mysterious truths thus forced upon his conviction.

What, then, is the reasonable, the only conclusion, to which he can arrive? That he cannot, consistently with any rule of sound argument, any more than conformably with what he conceives to be the unequivocal language of revelation, make common cause with the Unitarian, the Socinian, or the Arian. He feels that he has no alternative but that of receiving Scripture as a whole, or of rejecting it as a whole. He sees no diminution of the difficulty, if, discarding as human superadditions the larger portion of the recorded miracles of Holy Writ, he is compelled by the cogency of proof to retain any. Granting the reality of one, whether that one be the miracle of inspiration, the miracle of prophecy, or the miracle of the transmutation of natural objects, he knows that he has conceded the great question at issue, and that henceforward there remains no other point at which he can reasonably stop in the course of his admissions, than the full boundary line of Scripture itself.

But if he receive the whole of what we are taught to acknowledge as God's word, it will, then, assuredly be to him as the most stupendous and most excellent of God's gifts. It will strictly be his "Emmanuel, God with us." It will identify him in interests and in feeling with every thing, however noble and transcendental, which his imagination can conceive, or to which his most rapturous wishes can aspire. It will open all heaven before him, because he will know that the price of heaven has already been paid on his account; and it will scale and purge his eyesight with regard to every thing connected with the earth. It will inculcate no fanaticism, no ascetic mortifications, no contemptuous disregard or hard-hearted suppression of the charities of social and domestic life; for such are the false deductions of a morose human philosophy, following up its own harsh and *narrow* principles under the influence of superstitious

terror and unenlightened reason. But he will, notwithstanding, learn to see every thing in its proper proportions, and in its true colours. He will think less of this world, only because he will think of heaven the more; but his dealings with mankind will be in all fervour of affection, and cheerfulness, and guileless simplicity of heart. He will love man, because the principle of his religion is love, and because he knows that for the sake of man his gracious Redeemer quitted heaven and became a sojourner and an outcast upon earth; and he will love God with an intensity of which every other modification of religious belief is incapable, because no other religion teaches that our Creator has done for us what the Gospel assures us that he has done. Need we, then, ask the superfluous question whether Christianity, thus considered and thus adopted, will make him wiser and better? and if such be the certain result of its adoption, need we again ask whether that system of belief is really from God? "By their fruits ye shall know them," is the infallible criterion to which every Christian believer will confidently appeal in vindication of the hope which is in him: being fully assured that those tenets must be founded upon an immoveable basis of truth, the necessary consequence of which is to afford the best, or rather the only, explanation of the mysteries of God's Providence, and, whilst it kills in their first growth every germinating principle of vice, to develope a capability of spiritual holiness in man, of the possibility of which mere human reason could not have afforded us the slightest conception.

In the preceding dissertation an attempt has been made to give a summary sketch of the entire system of revelation, by tracing the converging tendency of *its various integral* parts from first to last, as they

unite to form one consistent design, and terminate in the establishment of a few most momentous propositions. The execution of the design has, from the extensive nature of the subject, been necessarily general and superficial: still, however, the mode of treating it here pursued will not, it is trusted, be without its use to many persons (whether coming under the denomination of believers or sceptics) whose attention may not have been accustomed to consider the uniformity of plan which appears to pervade the whole of God's dealings with mankind, should they, and more especially should the latter, be disposed to afford to it a small portion of their consideration. To readers of the former description it cannot, to say the least, be otherwise than beneficial, to acquire the habit of taking larger and more comprehensive views than they have yet done of the subject matter of their belief, and of thus confirming their previous impression of the truth of the various component doctrines of their religion, by observing how impossible it is to rest any of them singly and severally from its general contexture without the dislocation of the whole, and in fact without overturning the very fundamental principles of natural theology itself. In this respect the design of the comprehensive survey of the theory of Christianity here attempted will bear some resemblance to that of the blank outline maps which we place in the hands of young students in geography, by the aid of which the grouping and relative connexion of the several districts are rendered more easy of apprehension, than would be the case were they to commence by entangling themselves in minute questions of detail. In theology more especially, and more markedly than in other pursuits, an acquaintance with the actual location of a principle in the system of which it forms a part, is absolutely necessary for the purpose of its proper elucidation. A difficulty which would be insuperable when considered as a detached propo-

sition, often assumes the character of an obvious and necessary inference, when viewed in its proper position as a member of a connected series of correlative axioms.

With the sceptic, again, the appeal here made to principles recognised by himself, and to the test of uniform experience, may, it is hoped, operate as an inducement to commence a further and more elaborate examination, in all its minuter details, of the great question at issue, upon which he is imperatively urged by every principle of duty, interest, and sober reason, to return an impartial verdict. It is an obvious truth, that with the active business-like man of the world, the dogmatical inculcation of insulated doctrines of religion, however vital in themselves, and however really substantiated by strong external evidence, rarely succeeds. To minds thus preoccupied by the speculations of the passing hour, the mysterious dicta of our faith necessarily announce themselves with an air of paradox, when presented one by one, without reference to the other truths which ought to precede or accompany them. Abstract and impalpable doctrines are never accepted by us willingly, nor considered impartially, where no previous moral habits predispose us for their reception, and no strongly marked semblance of probability gives them an urgent claim upon our attention. Of all subjects of intellectual research, accordingly, that of theology, if we would ground our faith upon immoveable principles, requires the widest process of induction and the most thorough investigation of the indubitable principles of our own nature, and of the general laws of God's moral government. Partial, desultory, and confined views, whilst they present an almost insurmountable stumbling-block in the path of the sceptic, afford also an unsafe resting-place for the faith of even the best disposed Christian believer. It is only after a long and continuous effort of the *understanding* that the mist which envelopes these

transcendental questions gradually disperses, and we begin to perceive clearly, how, by the intimate interlacement of doctrine with doctrine, the great truths of revelation mutually aid and support one another. When the mind, by habitual contemplation, has become thoroughly familiarized with the wonders of the spiritual world, then, and not till then, the necessity not only of believing something, but of believing what, if broadly stated to the indolent and indifferent, will appear to be a degree of gratuitous credulity, forces itself irresistibly on the conviction.

It is on this account that the singular intellectual character of the age in which we live must tend to fill every well-wisher to the cause of religion and to mankind with feelings of anxiety, if not of alarm. This observation is not made from any disposition to augur altogether unfavourably of those habits of mental enterprise which mark the present day. Convinced, as we are, that the rapid movement which is now taking place in the course of events is part of that progressive system which the wisdom of Providence has destined to lead to the ultimate benefit of his creatures, we cannot doubt but that there exists, somewhere or other, in the busy scene around us, a sanative principle, which will deaden the energy of much of that moral poison which at present seems so copiously to infect the stream of science. It is the almost exclusively earthly tendency of the intellectual pursuits of the existing generation, and not the pursuits themselves, which we fear and deprecate. The evils resulting from the abuse of knowledge are not, indeed, peculiar to our own age. So long as the heart of man continues to be what it is, intelligence, like every other power, will as often be converted into a principle of mischief as of benefit. Be the favourite science of the moment what it may, it will, according to the opposite views of individuals, afford implements for the attack, no less than arguments for the defence, of religion. A century ago, when

the comparative stagnation of the public mind, by the greater degree of leisure which accompanied it, impressed upon our literature a more abstracted and visionary character than that which attaches to the more practical studies of our present men of letters, metaphysical studies, the legitimate pursuit of which may be numbered among the most effective auxiliaries of sound theology, supplied, as is well known, some of the most powerful aids to the genius of infidelity. A science which, as if by the touch of a magician, could make the whole material universe, as it were, disappear from our view, leaving to us nothing but thin and impalpable abstractions in its place, and which by attempting to explain the origin and growth of our ideas, and even the nature and constitution of the human soul, could contrive to render the fundamental axioms of Theism and morality equivocal in the conceptions of the half-informed, was naturally laid hold of with eagerness, as an excuse for their unbelief, by those persons whose unaspiring object it was to confine the whole scope and energy of our spiritual faculties within the narrow boundaries of this world's business. The delusion was strong whilst it lasted, but, like all other systems of unsubstantial philosophy, was no less transient. The age of unprofitable, and often of mischievous, idealism is now gone by, and has left little behind it to attract and interest the present generation, except the recollection of undecided controversies, and a few plausible ill-confirmed conjectures. The tendency of the literature of our own times is, unfortunately, in some important respects, of a directly contrary description. If the mysteries of the immaterial world were formerly ransacked with a petulant and profane curiosity, the fault now lies in the opposite extreme. With a strong dislike to every thing approaching to the reveries of abstraction, and, in fact, to every thing which does not contribute its share to the business of the passing

moment, the public sentiment has adopted a contemptuous tone with respect to the merely contemplative sciences which inclines us occasionally to look back almost with regret to the visionary studies of our forefathers. If metaphysical pursuits did nothing more than give us more accurate notions of the real conditions of actual existence, and show us how unlike our sensible and bodily perceptions are to the mysterious and inaccessible objects which they represent, they would, when duly cultivated, form no unimportant preparative for the discussion of the abstruse questions of theology. But it is rarely that we are content thus to travel the middle and the safest path. There is an exclusiveness in the tastes of the human faculties which seldom contents itself with the mere preference of one course of study to another. The occupation of the moment must be as every thing to us, and every other mode of mental exercise as nothing. What Cicero so justly remarked of the dangerous tendency of the épicurean doctrines, namely, that by discussing too exclusively the properties of material objects, they almost, of necessity, overlooked those spiritual entities the existence of which they professed to acknowledge, may afford a salutary hint to those persons who can anticipate no danger to the cause of religion from that eager attention to secular concerns which marks the times in which we live. "Cum in rerum naturâ duo quærenda sint, unum, quæ materia sit ex quâ quæque res efficiatur; alterum, quæ vis sit quæ quidque efficiat, de materiâ disseruerunt, *vim et causam efficiendi reliquerunt*." It is not, we trust, speaking uncharitably, to assert, that at the present moment, those sciences, which have for their immediate object the investigation of material objects, have got more than their due ascendency in general estimation; and whilst that state of things continues, infidelity of a certain kind *must be* the necessary consequence. Infidelity, we say, of a certain kind; for that to which we allude is

rather the negative unbelief resulting from indolence, inattention, preoccupation, worldly views, and a general distaste for the abstractions of speculative research, than that of an elaborate and well-digested system. The world, is at present, as little disposed to lend an attentive ear to the metaphysical Atheist as to the metaphysical Christian polemic. The infidelity, therefore, which we have reason to dread, is more that of pampered and selfish internal sentiment than that of open profession. The name of Christian may not be disavowed as a generic appellation, but the pure and high-minded feeling to which that designation in strictness belongs would probably be found to exist in far too weak a degree in the breasts of a large portion of the active members of society at present, to supply them with that energetic spirit of resistance which is necessary to enable them to compete successfully with the wordly tendencies too natural to us all.

Few states of mind are, perhaps, less accessible to conviction, in theological matters, than that which is characterized by the languor and indifference now described. The speculative student, who loves to launch into the thin impalpabilities of the ideal world, in order to make his meditations substantially useful, requires only that the current of his thoughts should be turned in the proper direction, and that he should possess the soundness of principle necessary to enable him to bestow upon each respective proposition its fitting and impartial examination. Meanwhile, his habitual intercourse with spiritual things supplies a proper training to fit him for the apprehension of religious topics. But the mind of the professed utilitarian presents scarcely a single point of approach for the arguments of the theologian. Address to it singly the various constituent doctrines of revelation, and they are instantaneously rejected as resting upon little and equivocal external proof, *and unsupported* by any collateral probabilities. Call

its attention to the theory and consistency of our religion as a whole, and we challenge it to an inquiry for which, as requiring an elaborate experimental survey of all the multifarious circumstances of our nature, it can afford neither sufficient time nor perseverance. Such is the practical state of unbelief of an active era like the present, which is the more difficult to deal with, because, having no professed theory of scepticism, there is no peculiar train of argument more especially adapted to command its notice. And yet we may confidently assert, that if society is destined to escape from the dislocation which threatens it, from the singular state of excitement which, from a combination of causes, pervades, at present, the whole civilized world, it will neither be the labour of the legislator, nor the ingenuity of the secular philosopher, but the corrective spirit of religion, in other words, the kindly, the humble, the self-denying principles of Christianity, which must accomplish the object.

There is something necessarily solemn, under any circumstances, in the idea of vast political communities, moving rapidly forward even in the course of legitimate improvement; but the feeling must be one of terror, if we have reason to believe that the great cement of the social system, the only effective bond of union between the discordant elements of human passion, is wanting at the very moment when its presence is most needful. At such a crisis all may look well for a short period of time, but the slightest agitation may, in an instant, disperse the whole intricate machinery into unseemly fragments. We speak seriously, and from the deepest conviction, when we say, that such is the kind of alarm which the existing aspect of society is calculated to suggest. With true piety for our load-star, and brotherly love and forbearance for our principle of action, we feel *confident*, not only that all may, but that all will, be *well*. No friend to mankind can wish the human

mind to retrograde in its movements; but every well disposed person must be deeply solicitous that the sedative and salutary coercion resulting from a paramount conviction of religious responsibility may regulate and restrain every its slightest tendency to deviate from the right and smooth path. If the next generation be not destined to act a fearful and melancholy, we may venture to anticipate that it will perform a comparatively enviable, part. The seeds of good and evil are abundantly sown, and accordingly, as the genial glow of Christianity, or the chill season of scepticism, shall prevail, the better or the worse principle will spring up.

Meanwhile, the theological disputant should recollect, that the prepossessed and carnal mind is little disposed to be won over to belief by undue severity of objurgation, or dogmatism in argument. The Christian revelation, we believe, from the sincerest conviction, to afford by far the most probable exposition of the modes of the divine government ever offered to the apprehension of man. Believing this, then, we ought to be both willing and able to meet the adversary upon his own ground; to show him that, even upon his own principles, the very points against which he contends supply the most rational solution of his difficulties; and that, turn where he will, whether to unassisted reason or to revelation, he must either be contented with a faith which, accepting much upon external testimony, and arriving at something more by legitimate research, is disposed to repose its main confidence upon a well-founded presumption of the Divine goodness, or that, abandoning that ground, he must be prepared to descend, step by step, into the most gloomy abyss of hopeless scepticism. False positions in theological argument, however conscientiously maintained, false excitement and over-statements, unseemly and unhallowed instruments at all times, and even bad taste and want of discrimination in the expression of our feelings,

are not likely to escape without censure or ridi
an acute and critical age, such as our own. A
tian teacher, accordingly, who, as such, wo
effectively useful to the busy community aroun
must, so far as his avocations will permit, kee
with the times in all the accomplishments of re
and ornamental knowledge. He must not all
his opponents the ready and plausible subte
that his belief is the result of his ignorance, or
narrowness of his conceptions. According
description given of him by his Divine Mas
must consider himself as "a light set upon a
towards which others are to look, and by whic
are to direct their steps. He must be ashamed n
of his faith nor of his ignorance, where both or
the other are in conformity with the Gospel sta
He must not withhold, through an unworthy tin
the avowal of principles, of the solidity of wh
is conscientiously convinced, nor, at the same
must he flinch from admitting that, with all h
confidence and satisfaction in the correctness
own views, he is still, in many respects, w
through life by faith only. Acting thus, he m
assured, that from the moment that the world
to treat him with scorn, as a visionary and an
siast, it will begin to turn towards him with fe
of respect. And when this sentiment prevails
turn, no small vantage ground is gained for t
therance of his projects of usefulness. Th
object is to excite the sober attention of mar
the second, to kindle a willingness and desire
better instructed. The point of repulsion onc
the victory over, unbelief is half secured. The
principles of conscience and morality, and
thrilling associations resulting from our con
with the things of the immaterial world, which
in every human breast, and require only to be
in order to make themselves perceived, wil
God's blessing, do the rest. The evidences

faith are, by the wisdom of Providence, so nicely balanced, that they are never gratuitously obtruded upon the mind which turns away from them, nor withheld from those who perseveringly seek after them. If scepticism is a sin against religious morality, it is because it is most frequently a consequence of coldness of heart, and of an indifference to the purest and noblest aspirations of our nature. Belief, accordingly, depends upon the will and upon a proper discipline of the affections much more than worldly men are willing to allow: so much so, that we may safely challenge the whole annals of scepticism to produce a single example of a person, who, having carefully examined all the arguments for and against the credibility of revelation, and with a sincere anxiety to arrive at the truth, has concluded his course by deliberately, and from conscientious conviction, taking his part with the unbeliever.

THE END.

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The consistency of the whole scheme
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